

Diverse Fostering Limited

Diverse Fostering Limited

Diverse House 481, High Street, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire ST6 5EP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Diverse Fostering Limited is a privately owned independent fostering agency that has been registered with Ofsted since 2020. The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent and respite placements. It also offers specialist placements, including sibling groups, parent and child and solo placements, and it offers placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people, teenagers and 'staying put' arrangements.

The agency is led by an experienced registered manager who registered with Ofsted in 2020. At the time of the inspection, the agency supported 24 fostering households and 43 children.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 May 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 22 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress as a direct result of the nurturing and warm care provided by their foster carers and the agency's practice. This high standard of care is underpinned by the excellent use of innovative and trauma-informed approaches. This supports and equips foster carers with the skills and resilience to cope with children's ever-changing needs.

Children experience thoughtful planned moves into their new homes. They build trusted and secure attachments with their foster families and flourish in many aspects of their lives. Foster carers ensure that the children's health, education and emotional needs are met. Carers are proud of their children's achievements.

Children with significant health needs flourish in the care of knowledgeable and experienced foster carers, enabling them to live their lives in full. One child, who spent large parts of their early life in hospital with limited life chances, is now able to take part in usual childhood activities and attend a nursery school with other children their own age. This is a direct result of the outstanding matching and risk assessment process by the agency.

Children spoke with warmth and confidence about their experiences of living with their foster families. One child said that they felt part of a family, while another child told the inspector that their foster carers help with their emotions. Many of the children referred to their foster carers as 'Mum' or 'Dad.'

More than half of the children live with permanent and long-term fostering families. In several cases, children are living alongside their siblings. This provides children with a sense of security and stability, and children form lasting bonds. In addition, assessments are underway for one child to be adopted by their current foster carers.

Creating stability for children is a strength and a primary focus at this agency. A proportion of children remain with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements. Foster carers are committed to providing a secure base for children so that they can pursue further education, employment or travel.

Children are encouraged to flourish in education or employment, and carers are effective advocates, ensuring that children have the right support at the right time. There is an incredible emphasis on children's enjoyment and leisure activities. Children are encouraged to develop positive friendship groups. They are routinely supported to take part in out-of-school activities to enrich their quality of life.

There is an inclusive culture at this agency, which also exists in the homes where children live. Foster carers engage children in conversations around subjects such as faith and sexuality, while creating safe spaces for them to discuss their views and ask questions.

The voice of the children flows throughout the agency. The agency continually reviews how it can purposely engage with the children to improve how it can respond to their needs. Most of the children take part in the 'VIP events,' and they have been involved in reviewing and developing the activities and events planner. Plans are considered for children to contribute to panel questions for the recruitment process for new foster carers. Children feel that they are listened to and that their wishes, views and feelings are heard.

Foster carers also feel valued and listened to. Feedback from foster carers has been immensely positive. Carers appreciate the personal touches from all staff in the agency, which they describe as a 'family.' Supervising social workers are described as 'fountains of knowledge.' This includes support from the agency staff, a buddying system that provides foster carers with peer support and groups that meet regularly. These platforms give foster carers enhanced opportunities to learn and share experiences.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

There are robust safeguarding practices throughout the fostering service. Children have individual risk assessments that are clear and concise. They are regularly reviewed and provide foster carers with relevant information to support children to keep safe and feel safe.

Safeguarding is proactive and creative, meaning that all children, including the most vulnerable, have a strong sense of safety and well-being and they are unlikely to be missing from care on a regular basis. A commitment to safeguarding is threaded throughout this agency. Children are appropriately safeguarded by consistently reliable foster carers and said that they feel safe. The trusting relationships between children and their foster carers offer a platform for honest and transparent discussions.

Dedicated foster carers do not avoid difficult situations or conversations; they support children to take age-appropriate risks and explore the world safely. One child explained how the conversations with her foster carers have helped them to understand risk. This approach encourages children to distance themselves from unsafe people and environments, which significantly improves their health and well-being.

Professional practice of the agency results in sustained improvement to the lives of children. Highly effective planning minimises risks to children. When children are new in placement, any known risks are well understood, and there is evidence to see that they are significantly reducing.

Instances of children going missing from care are rare. However, when children go missing, there are clear policies and procedures so appropriate action takes place to ensure that children return home safely. Targeted work by a family support worker

takes place to support children and foster carers to understand the reasons for children going missing and to help minimise them. The agency works hard to ensure that children receive return home interviews from their placing authorities. However, if these do not take place in a timely manner, supervising social workers are proactive and will visit the children to ensure that relevant information is captured to look at strategies to reduce the risk of children going missing.

When foster carers do not meet the high standard of care expected, the registered manager is vigorous in her approach to eliminate the negative impact on children. Concerns are managed efficiently and thoroughly. Foster carers are challenged appropriately, and records reflect learning and outcomes.

The leadership team appropriately uses auditing and reviewing procedures following serious incidents and safeguarding concerns being raised. Post-allegation reviews are analytical, are taken to panel and the agency decision-maker and are shared with local authority designated officers.

Managers ensure that unannounced visits are made to each fostering household every year. This also includes an additional personal visit by the registered manager. The records of these visits are detailed and highlight that children are spoken to alone and that safety checks of the foster carers' homes are carried out. This provides further opportunities for supervising social workers to meet the children and ensure that they are happy and safe.

The recruitment of foster carers, staff and panel members is comprehensive and thorough. There is clear management oversight of all recruitment. To further strengthen the process, during the inspection managers took action to ensure that future records would clearly show the reasons for leaving previous employment with children or vulnerable adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers promote a high culture of aspiration and have high expectations for what foster carers and children can achieve. The management team is inspirational, confident and ambitious for children and influential in changing the lives of those in the care of the agency.

The members of the leadership team are present within the agency and maintain regular contact with children, foster carers and staff. Managers' knowledge of the children is exceptional, and they have excellent oversight of children's progress.

Management systems for review and oversight of the agency are impeccable and highly effective. Managers continually review all aspects of the agency to aid the continual growth and development of the service. The registered manager and responsible individual are involved in monthly monitoring reports of the service and quality assurance feedback forms. The very regular overview of the service prompts change and innovation.

The agency has a culture of learning. The registered manager and the responsible individual are continually developing research-based practice and have taken active steps to ensure the continuous development and improvements of the service. One example where this has been particularly effective is in the agency's adoption of learning reviews of home supervisory visits, which are completed in line with the social care common inspection framework. These are excellent opportunities for staff and foster carers to develop.

Staff are very well supported and speak highly about the leadership team. The registered manager creates the right environment for successful reflective practice. As a result, staff are highly motivated and committed. They feel well supported, both formally and informally. High-quality supervision, appraisal, team meetings and training are valued by staff as they enable reflection on skills and safeguarding practice that is then used to support the development of the service.

High-quality training is provided to equip foster families, staff and panel members with the knowledge and skills to meet the children's wide-ranging needs and enable them to flourish. Training is research-based. It is informed by staff and foster carers and takes account of emerging practice and agency themes. Managers ensured that training to help support a child with significant complex health needs was provided for local authority social workers as well as the child's foster carers.

Managers are strategic in providing a service that operates in a focused geographic area. This helps the staff team to provide excellent-quality and timely support to foster families. Foster families and children have easy access to training, support groups and activities. The agency has branched into a neighbouring county and provides foster carers in this area with the same ease of access. Managers have strong relationships with local authorities, professional bodies and specialist services who operate within these areas.

An independent reviewing officer has been employed. This offers an additional level of scrutiny of foster carer approval. Foster carers' annual reviews are detailed and comprehensive. Annual reviews are completed within the required timescales and provide a wide range of information about the foster carer. Children actively contribute to their carers' reviews, which helps to capture an overview of their experiences.

The fostering panel consists of appropriately qualified and experienced members that are knowledgeable about the range of children's needs and carers. This supports competent decision-making. All panel members have received an annual appraisal and have completed all mandatory training.

In his role as agency decision-maker, the responsible individual offers clarity and scrutiny to decision-making. Decision-making is timely and well informed, and appropriate recommendations are in keeping with the overriding objective of promoting the welfare of children in the agency's care.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendation

- The fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards' 19.2)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2542463

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Inspector

Kev Brammer, Social Care Inspector

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