

Lotus Foster Care Ltd

Lotus Foster Care Ltd

Station Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2RD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency is based in Croydon, south London. The service aims to provide short-term care, bridging placements, long-term care, respite care, emergency care and sibling placements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 40 approved fostering households with 60 children living with its foster carers. The independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted in May 2020. The manager was registered at the same time.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 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: good

Children develop secure and trusted relationships with their foster families. Children receive good, individualised care that meets their needs. One child said that their foster carers 'offer patience, kindness and understanding, giving me a chance to be myself'. Children spoken to say that they feel 'loved', 'valued' and 'respected'.

The agency's matching process is robust. One commissioner said about the process, 'The agency is very responsive and are thorough with their matching. They know their carers' strengths, commitments and areas of development.'

Matching decisions routinely consider children's religious beliefs, faith, heritage and language needs. The agency ensures that valuable information for children is available in their first language, and interpreters are routinely used to support children to ensure that their views are understood and promoted. This provides a sense of security and enables children to feel some autonomy. The agency recognises that this may be more significant for those children who have travelled to the UK seeking refuge and asylum.

The agency works hard to ensure that children's moves into their foster carers' homes are sensitively managed. This includes planned introductions and overnight stays. Each child receives a welcome box that has a copy of the children's guide and personalised gifts.

Children's physical and emotional health needs are met well. Foster carers support children to live healthy lifestyles and to meet their developmental milestones. Staff and foster carers understand children's health needs and manage children's health and treatment plans safely.

Foster carers ensure that children's educational needs are met, with children making good progress from their starting points. The agency's education adviser provides support and advice to foster carers and staff to ensure that children reach their full academic potential. They also provide them with other educational activities for occasions where children may be awaiting a school or college place. Staff and foster carers are strong advocates for children and mark children's achievements. Children's achievements are celebrated at awards evenings held by the agency.

The agency actively looks for and values children's opinions. Children can participate in the Children and Young People's Forum, where they can share their thoughts, build relationships and engage in social events and activities. Children are informed about the complaints process and understand how to raise concerns. Complaints about the service are rare, but when they do arise, management handles them promptly and with care.

Children are supported when part of their care plan is to spend time with family members and those that are important to them. Foster carers and agency staff work

closely with the local authority to ensure that arrangements are always in the best interest of children.

Foster carer assessments are of a good standard and are comprehensive and analytical in deciding whether applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers. A newly approved foster carer said of the assessment process, 'Every step was always professional, personable. I felt comfortable, at ease and fully supported by the team members.'

The agency has a robust annual review process for foster carers. Foster carers report that their needs are considered thoughtfully, with reviews conducted by both the assessor and the fostering panel. When questions arise, reflective discussions and/or training sessions are promptly arranged. This proactive approach ensures that foster carers stay motivated and well prepared to consistently provide high-quality care for children.

Personal development plans are set up, and foster carers receive help from access to ongoing training opportunities. However, while these plans are agreed with foster carers, the records do not fully capture their views.

Foster carers describe receiving excellent support from their supervising social workers. They say that staff are approachable, adaptive, caring and responsive.

Foster carers advocate for their children, with the support of supervising social workers, who help in challenging placing authorities when necessary. This collaboration ensures that children receive individualised care, leading to the best possible outcomes for them.

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

Children say that they feel safe in their foster homes.

Foster carers and agency staff show strong skills in identifying, understanding and effectively managing risks. Placement plans and risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they stay relevant. Supervising social workers develop tailored safer care plans for foster carers, which are routinely reassessed. Risk management strategies are carefully designed to meet each child's unique needs, ensuring their safety and well-being.

If new risks appear, foster carers are quick to attend specific training to help them further understand and support the child. This helps them to feel confident in understanding and minimising risks for children.

Foster carers receive and attend relevant safeguarding and child protection training in line with the agency's required timescales. A large directory of training is provided within the agency to safeguard and promote the needs of children in its care.

The agency works closely with partner agencies to monitor the risk. Foster carers and supervising social workers share pertinent information with external partners promptly.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. When children have been missing from home, the foster carers have responded appropriately and acted by following the child's plans.

Investigations into allegations are prompt and effective, typically conducted by an independent social worker. These investigations are managed sensitively, keeping children at the centre of all enquiries. The agency diligently follows up on recommendations made.

Foster carers who are subject to complaints or standard of care investigations receive appropriate support. Additional training and resources are provided to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to keep children safe. The agency maintains a strong relationship with the local authority designated officer, who provides annual training for staff and foster carers on managing allegations.

Managers ensure that staff, foster carers and panel members recruited to the agency are safely vetted. This confirms that those working for the fostering agency are suitable to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers in this fostering agency are inspirational, confident and deeply committed to the well-being of children. Their influence is transformative, positively impacting on the lives of children in the agency's care.

The agency is guided by a registered manager who is highly qualified and has a clear and strategic vision for its future. Supported by a senior management team of experienced and thoughtful social care practitioners, they have fostered a child-centred and compassionate culture that is cherished by staff, children and carers alike.

Stakeholder feedback about this fostering service has been overwhelmingly positive. As one local authority strategic placement manager expressed, 'They are an agency I would place all our cared-for children with if I could!'

The registered manager completes a quarterly management review of the service. Children's progress trackers are incorporated into this to monitor the individual progress of each child. However, these reports are not always sent to Ofsted in line with regulations.

The senior management team knows the agency's strengths and weaknesses well and has a clear development plan for growth and improvement, which is still child focused. Leaders and managers know that some case records need to improve to better reflect children's day-to-day experiences. Foster carer logs vary in quality and content, but there is ongoing effort to ensure that information held is consistently beneficial for the child.

The management team is dedicated to finding innovative ways to improve outcomes for children in its care. Managers are enthusiastic about implementing aspects of the Mockingbird model of foster care, which replicates the support and relationships of an extended family. For example, carers are linked with mentoring foster carers.

Leaders and managers provide foster carers with excellent support and supervision. Foster carers attend regular support sessions, where they can share experiences and receive further advice in workshops on specific areas, such as working with professionals, caring for unaccompanied minors and dealing with traumatic bereavement. The agency also arranges regular brunch meetings for foster carers to come together and holds annual appreciation social events.

These initiatives are highly valued by foster carers and demonstrate the agency's commitment to their well-being. One carer said, 'They are not only highly skilled and knowledgeable but also genuinely caring individuals who go above and beyond to ensure the well-being of both carers and children. The level of support I have received has been nothing short of amazing. They have made my experience as a foster carer incredibly rewarding.'

The fostering agency has an experienced and knowledgeable panel chair. Panel members possess relevant skills and expertise to make recommendations on suitability and the continued suitability of foster carers. The administration of the fostering panel is effective. Fostering panel members prepare for panel meetings by finding areas of vulnerability to explore with the assessor and prospective foster carers. This provides a thorough consideration and recommendation on the prospective foster carer's suitability to foster.

The agency's decision-maker is suitably qualified and provides a clear rationale when considering foster carers. They will challenge the panel when appropriate and will offer guidance for further learning if identified. This gives further assurance that foster carers recruited have the skills and resilience to care for children and keep them safe.

Staff receive effective and regular supervision and appraisals. Staff say that they feel valued and enjoy their job. One member of staff described the agency as being a 'family' and 'second home'.

Management continues to offer and support student placements and promote career development and training opportunities for staff. For example, sponsoring staff in attaining further formal qualifications and post-qualifying qualifications.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers' views are consistently recorded in relation to trainings identified within their performance and development plans. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that management of the service ensures all fostering activity is consistent with 2011 regulations. This is related to specifically ensuring that monitoring reports are always shared with Ofsted. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.3)

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: 2563888

Registered provider: Lotus Foster Care Ltd

Registered provider address: 35 Bedser Drive, Greenford, Middlesex UB6 0SE

Responsible individual: Vanessa Price

Registered manager: Josekutti Jose

Telephone number: 020 8106 6800

Email address: duty@lotusfostercare.co.uk

Inspector

Amanda Burrows, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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