

Star Fostering Ltd

Star Fostering Ltd

Unit 2b, East Bridgford Business Park, Kneeton Road, East Bridgford, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG13 8PJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Star Fostering Ltd is an independent fostering agency based in East Bridgford, Nottinghamshire. The agency was registered by Ofsted in 2019.

The agency offers a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, it had 27 fostering households and 39 children in placement.

The registered manager and the responsible individual have been registered since 2019.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 December 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 28 June 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

There are significant shortfalls in the leadership and management of the fostering agency. There are also significant concerns in how well children are protected from harm. For such reasons, the overall judgement is inadequate.

Children's overall experiences are mixed. Some children make good progress, whereas other children's well-being and safety needs are not met. There are some good examples of children being supported by their foster carers to do well in education. There was a good example of the fostering agency advocating for one child to move schools when this was deemed necessary. Children's education attainment is discussed as part of foster carer supervisions.

Foster carers do support children's physical health. Children's medication and health appointments are documented by foster carers. Many children stay active through being part of many extracurricular sporting activities. However, for children who are in receipt of children's disability benefits, children's records do not yet evidence how foster carers are supported to manage children's monies safely and in accordance with each child's wishes and feelings. Children's records do not provide an overview as to how their money is being spent on their behalf.

Although most children experience long-term stability with their foster families, others do not. When foster carers give notice to end children's placement, there is a reliance on the foster carers recording why the child's placement has ended. The fostering agency does not yet record endings for children as part of meaningful life-story work. This means that children may only receive one narrative as to why their placement may have ended. Overall, children's recordings are not yet recorded in a way that recognises children's trauma or individualistic needs.

Child participation and foster carer engagement is a strength of the fostering agency. For example, foster carers host support groups in each other's homes. Children receive welcome boxes when they join a foster family. Foster carers, staff and children attend a Christmas pantomime and several events throughout the year. There was a good example of children's artwork being displayed as part of a Christmas card competition. The registered manager has put lots of incentives in place to support children to achieve and make progress.

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

There have been several occasions where children have suffered from harm or have been at risk of harm. This is because safety measures have not been implemented adequately to protect children. There is a pattern of children's safety needs not being adequately recognised, responded to, or prioritised by the fostering agency.

Statutory assessment checks are not consistently undertaken during fostering assessments. For example, one foster carer was approved at panel despite there being no assessment of their criminal offence, their past relationships, or their family network. When applicants raise safety concerns about their ex-partners during the assessment process, this is often taken at face value by the fostering agency. There is an overreliance on self-reported information when deciding whether an ex-partner reference is necessary or not. Children are at risk of harm because not all foster carers are being safely recruited.

When approved foster carers develop new relationships, there is considerable drift in the fostering agency assessing whether such individuals are safe people to spend time with vulnerable children. There is a distinct lack of professional curiosity. For example, one foster carer's partner was able to spend time with a child on multiple occasions despite this person being a known risk. This person was able to join a foster carer supervision visit where the child's personal information was shared. This was despite risks regarding this partner being unassessed. This put the child at risk of harm.

Although many children are positive about their foster families, other children experience challenges and raise concerns. When concerns arise, the fostering agency is not consistently responding in a way that supports each child's well-being and safety. For example, one child was exposed to a domestic violence incident. This was not sufficiently assessed, and adequate steps were not taken to determine whether the child was safe. Similarly, when the registered manager was alerted to foster carers using unapproved surveillance monitoring with children, no steps were taken to protect the children's privacy. Not all complainants receive written responses to their concerns. Unless this is in place, children will not know how their concerns are being responded to.

The registered manager has not understood their role in needing to refer foster carers to the disclosure and barring service. For example, one foster carer was not referred despite this person threatening significant harm towards a vulnerable child. This puts wider children at risk of harm.

The fostering agency has failed to report some significant safeguarding information to Ofsted. This is because certain concerns are not recognised as significant. This is a widespread issue.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The fostering agency lacks independent scrutiny at a systemic level. Although the independent review mechanism recently identified concerns about the fostering agency, professionalism and boundaries, minimal action was taken by the fostering agency to respond to these comments. Family members have professional roles within the organisation. This is increasingly raising the potential risk of there being a conflict of interest.

The registered manager is well regarded by staff, foster carers and children. However, there is a pattern of the manager being overly optimistic and forming safety-based decisions based on relationship-based assumptions. Manager assessments and evaluations for decision-making are not well recorded on children's or foster carer files. Safeguarding processes are not consistently being followed by staff. Decisions are not rooted in evidence-based practice. This puts children at risk of harm.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision. However, the quality of supervision has been described as poor by those in receipt of it. Supervising social workers dispute that some written records of supervision are accurate. Despite this, there is little evidence of staff requesting for corrections to be made. Staff supervision documents have largely remained unsigned. For such reasons, it is unclear whether reflective case management discussions have happened or not. This is an area that the registered manager has recognised, and some measures have been put in place to address this. For example, the registered manager recognises that necessary auditing of supervisions were not happening when staff were being supervised by a previous assistant manager. Since the registered manager has started to supervise staff there have been some improvements.

Supervising social workers are not well supported to understand the importance of professional curiosity, and they are not directed as to when professional challenge needs to happen. Multi-agency working is not yet to a good standard. The registered manager is not yet modelling to staff how risks should be safely assessed and triangulated. Regular file audits do not happen, and quality assurance processes are not yet to a standard which keeps children safe.

Despite significant shortfalls, stakeholder feedback is overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care that children are receiving.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
* The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency. (Regulation 8 (a)(b))	15 March 2024
* The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's— wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding). (Regulation 11 (a)(b)(i))	15 March 2024
Arrangements for the protection of children The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. The written policy must include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with that foster parent.	15 March 2024

The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for— liaison and co-operation with any local authority which is, or may be, making child protection enquiries in relation to any child placed by the fostering service provider, the prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed by the fostering service provider, notification of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries involving a child placed by the fostering service provider, to the Chief Inspector, written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response, consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e))	
Subject to paragraph (7), the registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must establish a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency. The procedure must, in particular, provide— for the procedure to be made known to— children placed by the agency (subject to their age and understanding). The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation. The registered person must ensure that— children are enabled to make a complaint or representation, and no child is subject to any reprisal for making a complaint or representation. (Regulation 18 (1) (2)(e)(i) (4) (5)(a)(b))	15 March 2024

All relevant individuals should be provided with a written response from the registered manager which explains how their complaint will be investigated and responded to. All outcomes should be shared in writing.	
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))	15 March 2024

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. The registered person should ensure that children's records are meaningful, and written records should explain significant milestones and placement endings for children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 1.7)
- Where a child is eligible for benefits as a result of a disability, foster carers are encouraged to apply for those benefits. There are regular recorded discussions about how any additional benefits are being spent to promote the best interests of the child. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 56, paragraph 28.9)

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: 2567404

Registered provider: Star Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: C/O Keith Willis Associates, Gothic House, Barker Gate, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG1 1JU

Responsible individual: Robert North

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Inspectors

Andi Lilley-Tams, Regional Inspection Manager
Helen Gronhaug, Social Care Inspector

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