

Achieving For Children

Achieving for Children Community Interest Company

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, Town Hall, St. Ives Road,
Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 1RF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Achieving For Children independent fostering agency for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead registered with Ofsted in July 2020.

Achieving For Children is a community interest company which was created in 2014 by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to provide their children's services, with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead joining in 2017. The agency delivers fostering services to children in these three boroughs. This report refers to the registration for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead part of the agency.

The fostering service provides the following types of placement: short term, long term, specialist, respite, emergency and sibling placements.

The fostering agency is also undertaking viability and full assessments of kinship carers and supporting those carers once approved, including the making of a Special Guardianship Order in some instances.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 20 fostering households and 15 kinship households and 46 children in placement.

There is a manager in post who has applied to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 2 August 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 are thriving in the care of their foster families. Children are supported to achieve and overcome the adversities they have faced in their lives. Foster carers are committed to the children in their care, and inspectors repeatedly heard how they go 'above and beyond' for the children.

Children said that they enjoy the activities they participate in, whether that be after-school clubs, sports or days out and holidays with their foster family. There are opportunities for children to join the Children in Care Council, known as 'Kickback', through which children take part in a range of activities and outings as well as provide feedback on all aspects of their life.

Children's cultural needs are typically well met by their carers. While every effort is made to match children with carers who offer a cultural match, this is not always possible. However, this has not hindered children in being able to practise their religion, for example. Children are supported to attend their place of worship each week to fully participate in their faith. However, more widely, the rate of attendance of foster carers on the equality, diversity and inclusion training is poor.

Children have good school attendance. Working relationships with other professionals are strong, including with education colleagues. The agency is well positioned to work closely with other children's departments in the best interests of children. These include well-being and youth worker teams as well as children's social workers. Joint visits to carers alongside the child's social worker are commonplace and help to eliminate opportunities for miscommunication and promote stronger inter-agency working.

The support provided by supervising social workers is highly regarded by foster carers. Carers feel well supported by their allocated social worker and confident that any issues will be quickly resolved.

Carers are attracted to the agency as they feel it is the natural and ethical choice. Leaders and managers have worked hard to make their offer competitive in the current climate of a declining number of foster carer enquiries. There is now a dedicated role, covered by two members of staff, with a focus on recruitment and retention.

The agency's biggest area of growth is assessments for kinship carers. To meet demand, the agency intends to incorporate more viability assessments into its work and will be developing the team's skills in family group conferences. Thus, exploring every opportunity for children to remain within their families. The agency recognises that this will increase the support demands on the team and is ambitious in meeting these. Currently, kinship carers reported being very happy with the level of support they receive.

Children's views and feedback are routinely requested and captured during carers' annual review process. However, there are limited examples of this being sought at other points in time. For example, children did not feel that they were consulted about their respite arrangements.

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

Children are kept safe within this agency. Safeguarding incidents are few, with only one example of a child going missing from their foster home. In this case, there were strong working relationships evident between all professionals involved to coordinate a response, as there was an identified risk of exploitation. Actions taken by the carers and network did help to reduce the risks to the child. However, records indicate that the carers could have further benefited from specific training on this topic to understand the grooming process and power dynamics in this context. This is planned for later in the year but was not provided in a timely manner to develop their knowledge. Furthermore, professional curiosity is not always reflected in the carers' records to understand the finer details of the child's experiences.

Unplanned endings are few and have mostly occurred in bridging placements following an allegation. Leaders and managers track such patterns and have reflected with colleagues about what this means and how things can be improved. Work is underway for the matching of bridging placements to be reviewed on an ongoing basis while a more long-term match can be identified. Carers and the agency understand the importance of children having positive moves, even when they happen unexpectedly. In both cases that were reviewed, carers have wanted to ensure that the child knows that they are still loved.

Allegations are well responded to, and appropriate steps are taken to ensure children's safety. There are strong working relationships with the local authority designated officer, and necessary steps are taken to understand the allegation and the context in which it has occurred. Where this leads to a review of the standards of care, the investigation is thorough and captures the carers' response. Reports clearly outline the findings and recommendations. However, these are not always clearly captured in the carers' supervision records as an agenda item for discussion with their social worker.

The agency has one mockingbird constellation in use and is hoping to expand this further. This has been well received by the carers, and those involved speak highly of the support, both practical and emotional, that this provides them.

Carers' supervision is regular, and carers report on the high-quality support of their workers. However, the documents used are repetitive and lengthy, and this has led to some inconsistencies in how information is captured.

Other records, such as safer care plans and risk assessments, do not always adequately capture the risk nor the expectations of how carers are to respond. However, this has not impacted on the quality of the care the children are provided, and carers know how to keep children safe. It is noted that, during the inspection,

leaders and managers have responded to this by arranging training for the team to develop staff's skillset in completing these documents.

Arrangements for out-of-hours support are strong, and the practical arrangements work well. Although used infrequently, carers reported that they are always able to contact a member of staff in an emergency.

The training offer from the agency is good; however, the take up is low in some topics, including core training. Although this is an improving picture, carers do not always take responsibility for their learning and professional development. Leaders and managers have recently changed provider for some training in response to carer feedback and are hopeful this will have a positive impact. A small number of carers have received non-violence resistance training. This offers carers a deeper understanding and develops their skillset when having to use de-escalation techniques with the children in their care, in line with the agency's policy of no physical intervention.

While training is a standing item in carers' supervision, there is not always a proactive stance, and opportunities have been missed. For example, carers approved for a child aged two years and under did not receive paediatric first-aid training until the child had been placed for five months.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is run by passionate and committed managers who are dedicated to improving the service for children and carers. The team manager is new in post and well regarded by staff and carers. Leaders and managers were highly receptive to feedback throughout the inspection, and in some instances, they have reflected and taken action to address areas of vulnerability immediately.

Staff speak highly of the leaders and managers and working for the agency. Staff receive regular and good-quality supervision from managers. Supervision is reflective, and there is a clear focus on staff well-being, case management and professional development and training. Leaders and managers ensure that staff receive the support with specific issues and concerns and ensure they have tools to undertake their role.

Professional working relationships are a strength of this agency. Children's social workers spoke highly of the collaborative working, and this was evidenced repeatedly, particularly when there were concerns over placement stability.

Panel offers robust scrutiny to the agency, and there have been a number of examples where panel have appropriately deferred cases for further assessment due to gaps in the information presented. This does raise questions about the management oversight and quality assurance processes in place. However, this has already been recognised and is now being addressed with the use of consultation meetings with leaders and managers to identify issues earlier in the process. Staff have reported that they feel well supported through this mechanism.

Similarly, there are some gaps in the management oversight of carers and how this information is being captured. The new manager in post is yet to develop strategies that assist them in having a greater understanding of carer compliance, such as completing core training and risk assessments being completed in a timely manner to a good standard.

The agency offers multiple opportunities for carers to access support forums, which also includes being able to provide feedback about the service. However, these do not have high attendance, and communication channels are not always clear. Subsequently, carers do not always feel they have a clear understanding of the agency's objectives.

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 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. (Regulation 11 (a)) In particular, ensure that safer care plans and risk assessments comprehensively identify potential risks and are explicit in the detail of how these will be mitigated and managed.	30 April 2025
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3). (Regulation 17 (1) (2)) In particular, carers must be provided with training relevant to the children's needs. Also, carers must be up to date with core training, such as paediatric first aid, at the earliest opportunity.	31 October 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings should have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's

wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. In particular, ensure the recording of carers' supervision is full and accurate, detailing the discussions that took place and any directions for the carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)

- The registered person should ensure that the management of the service ensures all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. In particular, ensure management decisions and oversight are recorded consistently and that leaders and managers have a thorough oversight of the work undertaken by and with carers. ('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: 2576030

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Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector
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