

Avanti Fostering

Avanti Fostering Ltd

Avanti Fostering, Devonshire House, 582 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 1JS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Avanti Fostering is an independent fostering agency that has been operating since June 2020.

The registered manager post has been vacant since 16 March 2021.

The agency provides short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child placements.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

This was the agency's first inspection.

At the time of this inspection visit, the agency had nine approved fostering households. The agency provided placements for eight children. Two sisters live together with their brother in one foster family. One baby is placed together with their adult mother.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

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: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

The failings in the leadership and management of the service, and how well children are helped and protected, mean that the overall experiences and progress of children are inadequate. The agency's systems, processes and practices insufficiently support foster carers in their safeguarding and caregiving roles. This, together with the lack of management oversight, increases the risks to the stability and effectiveness of children's placements.

Several children's placements did not end well. On one occasion, a foster carer told the police not to return one child to their care and on another occasion, a foster carer ended one child's placement while the child was attending school. These were difficult and negative experiences for the children and everyone else involved.

The agency does not evidence that it listens to children. The supervising social worker (SSW) does not see children on their own to obtain their views about their foster family. The records relating to the agency's visits to foster families are not child-focused.

The agency does not sufficiently help foster carers to support children's individual needs. Examples include the lack of support plans in respect of meeting children's health and education needs. This is of a particular concern as a number of children in foster placements are prescribed many different medications or are not in education.

The agency does not promote equality and diversity sufficiently. The agency does not demonstrate how it helps foster carers to provide culturally sensitive support to children from other ethnic and religious backgrounds, and when there is a linguistic barrier to communication. The agency does not keep any records relating to its matching process and decisions.

The assessment of prospective foster carers is not always thorough. On two occasions, the panel was unable to make recommendations regarding approval until additional information was obtained. The gaps included information relating to safeguarding and finances.

On some occasions, foster carers were approved subject to a list of actions, which must be completed before any children are placed with them. This means that at the point of being approved, the foster carers were not ready to foster. It is of additional concern that on one occasion, the agency placed a child with the foster carer before the recommended actions were fulfilled.

The children currently placed with this agency appear to be settled and are building positive relationships with their foster carers. The children have positive experiences

and are making progress in many areas of their lives. Their social workers talked positively about the foster carers and the agency.

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

The agency's risk management practices are poor and do not safeguard children effectively. Risk assessments and safety plans have not been completed for any children. This includes children with clearly identified vulnerabilities and risks, such as those relating to sexting (sending sexually explicit content via a mobile phone) and sexual exploitation, going missing from care and self-harming.

There is confusion within the fostering service about the safer caring plans. The supervising social worker is not aware of the existence of these plans, while the manager believed that each fostering household has one. The manager is not aware that these plans need to be reviewed and updated when children are placed with foster carers. Furthermore, reviews do not take place when children are placed with foster carers.

Poor training opportunities increase the risks of children not being appropriately safeguarded. The agency does not provide training on specific safeguarding topics, such as online safety, child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, radicalisation, female genital mutilation and honour-based violence. Consequently, foster carers are not suitably trained to recognise and respond to safeguarding risks. This does not ensure that children are safeguarded effectively.

The agency does not recognise peer-on-peer abuse. When a child experienced an assault by their peer, the agency failed to provide suitable support. Its main focus was on dealing with the allegation against the foster carer that the other peer made.

The fostering service does not have a system for monitoring instances when children are missing from care. The foster carers' own record-keeping relating to this is inconsistent. However, it was highlighted in a statutory review that one child has made great progress in this area.

The agency's policy on safeguarding children does not include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with foster parents. This is despite the agency accepting a placement of a mother and baby.

The agency's matching and placement decisions do not safeguard children. A mother and baby were placed with a foster carer who was not assessed or approved for this particular type of placement and has not had the appropriate training. On another occasion, the foster carer who was approved for two foster children had three foster children placed with her. The manager said that this happened in an emergency as the arrangements for one of the children to leave did not materialise. The agency does not have a process for dealing with emergencies of this kind.

Staff recruitment processes are not thorough. None of the required information is available on the file of a previous panel member and there are gaps in some other staff files. This demonstrates poor and unsafe recruitment practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

This agency does not operate in line with the fostering regulations and the national minimum standards. As a result, this inspection has resulted in 19 requirements and two recommendations.

The agency's leaders and managers lack fostering experience and knowledge. The provider has appointed a manager who has never worked in the fostering sector and is not suitably qualified for the role. The agency's only SSW has not had prior experience in fostering social work.

Neither the manager nor the SSW have received a formal induction into their roles. The SSW receives supervision from the manager, who is not a social worker and does not have sufficient fostering knowledge and skills. This arrangement limits the opportunities to reflect on social work fostering practice and to identify areas for improvement.

Training opportunities for staff and foster carers are limited. The agency has not provided any training to its foster carers. None of the foster carers had begun working on their training, support and development standards until after the inspection had been announced.

The agency's record-keeping is not fit for purpose. There are widespread failures to keep required records in the detail prescribed by the fostering regulations. This includes basic records, such as the register of foster carers, the register of children placed with this fostering service and the record of placements with foster carers. For example, one child who was placed with the agency for four weeks did not appear on any of these records. Another two children who lived with this agency's foster carers were not on the agency's children's register.

The statement of purpose contains contradictory and inaccurate information about the manager of the service. Not all foster children know about the fostering agency. The manager emailed a copy of the children's guide to the agency's foster carers after the inspection was announced. The manager did not know if, and how, this information was shared with the children.

The minutes of the fostering panels do not include the date when the panel took place. The form used by the service is inconsistently completed, with many areas left blank. On some occasions, it has been recorded that the prospective carers were informed of the panel's decision to approve them. The agency decision-maker wrote that they 'concur with the panel decision' and the agency's welcoming letter talked about the foster carer being approved by the fostering panel. The fostering regulations specify that the panel makes recommendations and cannot make any decisions related to their approval.

Poor record-keeping undermines monitoring. Systems are not in place to support management monitoring. Leaders and managers have not completed any monitoring reports and do not have a sufficient oversight of the agency.

Leaders and managers do not share information with Ofsted, as required. This limits the regulator's monitoring of this service. In addition to not supplying Ofsted with an annual monitoring report, leaders and managers failed to notify Ofsted of some significant events. This includes allegations against foster carers and serious incidents that resulted in the involvement of the emergency services.

Leaders and managers started working on an action plan to improve the fostering service while the inspection was in progress. They expressed their commitment to appointing a suitable manager and making the service right for children and foster carers. Ofsted is considering what actions to take following this inspection. Ofsted has informed the placing authorities and the host authority about the inadequate judgement.

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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the children's guide to the Chief Inspector, to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding). (Regulation 3 (4)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that each child receives a copy of the fostering service's children's guide and is helped to understand its content. Parents in the parent and child placements must also receive a copy of the guide to the services provided.	1 December 2021
The fostering service provider must— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide. (Regulation 4 (a)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the statement of purpose provides clear and accurate information about the registered manager of the fostering service.	1 December 2021
A person must not manage a fostering agency unless they are fit to do so. A person is not fit to manage a fostering agency unless that person— having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it— has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering agency. (Regulation 7 (1) (2)(b)(i))	1 December 2021

Specifically, the registered person must ensure that a professional who is fit for the role of a fostering manager is appointed.	
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, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the fostering service is run in line with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.	1 December 2021
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)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that there is an assessment of vulnerabilities and risks for each child, and that risk management plans are in place whenever a risk has been identified.	1 December 2021
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's— religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11 (b)(ii)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that it is evident that this is considered as part of the matching process and also, as part of ongoing support to multicultural fostering households.	1 December 2021

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. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (2))	1 December 2021
The fostering service provider must promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. In particular, the fostering service provider must ensure that each child— is provided with such individual support, aids and equipment which the child may require as a result of any particular health needs or disability the child may have. (Regulation 15 (1) (2)(c)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that there is a clear procedure for dealing with children’s medication. This must include foster carers’ training, record-keeping and the arrangements for children to receive their medication when they are away from their fostering households.	1 December 2021
The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents. In particular, the fostering service provider must— implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents; promote the regular school attendance and participation in school activities of children of compulsory school age placed with foster parents, and provide foster parents with such information and assistance, including equipment, as may be necessary to meet the educational needs of children placed with them. (Regulation 16 (1) (2)(a)(b)(c))	1 December 2021

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). The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (2) (3))	1 December 2021
The fostering service provider must not— employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless— full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that full and satisfactory information is available on the files of all staff, either employed or working through a contract, such as panel members.	1 December 2021

The fostering service provider must maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. The records referred to in paragraph (1) must be retained for at least 15 years from the date of the last entry. (Regulation 22 (1) (2)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that a register in respect of each child placed with foster parents is maintained.	1 December 2021
A fostering panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24 (2)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the panel minutes are dated and sufficiently detailed. The minutes must make clear that the panel is making recommendations and not making any decisions on behalf of the fostering service provider.	1 December 2021
Where a person ("X") applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decide to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. At the end of the 10 working days referred to in paragraph (2)(d) (or when X's observations are received, whichever is sooner), the fostering service provider must send— the report prepared under paragraph (2)(c), X's observations on that report, if any, and any other relevant information obtained by the fostering services provider, to the fostering panel. (Regulation 26 (1) (4)(a)(b)(c)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure better quality of the assessments of prospective foster carers. The assessment reports must include, scrutinise and evaluate all relevant information before they are sent to the fostering panel for its considerations.	1 December 2021
If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must—	1 December 2021

give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the “foster care agreement”). (Regulation 27 (5)(a)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that children are placed in accordance with the foster carers’ terms of approval.	
A fostering service provider must maintain a case record for each foster parent approved by them which must include copies of the documents specified in paragraph (2) and the information specified in paragraph (3). The information referred to in paragraph (1) is, as the case may be— a record of each placement with the foster parent, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated, and the circumstances of the termination. (Regulation 30 (1) (3)(a))	1 December 2021
The fostering service provider must maintain a register (a “register of foster parents”) and enter in it the following particulars in relation to each foster parent— the date of approval and of each review of approval (as the case may be). (Regulation 31(b))	1 December 2021
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a	1 December 2021

fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3))	
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))	1 December 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are appropriately prepared for fostering tasks. They should not be approved before they are ready to have children placed with them. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.3)
- The registered person should ensure that all staff receive a comprehensive formal induction to their role. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1)

Information about this inspection

The inspector has 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: 2587129

Registered provider: Avanti Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Devonshire House, 582 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 1JS

Responsible individual: Dilber Bhamra

Registered manager: post vacant

Telephone number: 07951951086

Email address: info@avantifostering.co.uk

Inspector

Seka Graovac, Social care inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

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

© Crown copyright 2021