

Vineyard Fostering

Vineyard Fostering

Hart House, Kimpton Road, Luton LU2 0LB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency has been operating since December 2020 and provides short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, 6 fostering households were providing placements for 5 children. One young person provided feedback to the inspector.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 23 April 2024.

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 February 2026

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

Date of last inspection: 7 November 2022

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 thrive while living with nurturing foster carers who are committed to their best interests. A young person said, 'The agency is blessed with amazing carers.'

Children make progress socially and emotionally, and younger children are meeting their developmental milestones. Children are happier and more expressive, and they have better communication skills and increased confidence and self-esteem because of the care they receive.

Children receive good-quality care from dedicated, skilled foster carers. Foster carers demonstrate expertise in various areas, such as parent and child placements and skilled partnership working that enables children to return to their families. Social workers praise carers. One social worker described a foster carer as a 'gem' who provided 'exceptional' care because of their 'cultural awareness, professionalism and commitment'.

Young parents who care for their own children in fostering families also commend the guidance they receive. Parents highlight their improved self-discipline, parenting skills, self-confidence and self-worth.

Young parents have been involved in the development of the service. A young parent has assisted in creating a guide for other parents. This provides an accurate overview of the agency, the fostering role and the available support.

Children quickly feel part of the foster family. They make positive attachments with their foster carers, with one child fondly referring to their foster carer as 'Aunty'. Social activities enable foster families to spend quality time together and help children positively interact with each other. Activities include a summer picnic, a pantomime and an end-of-year meal.

Children's health and educational needs are promoted. Children attend nursery, school or college, and some benefit from apprenticeships. Older children learn about the importance of healthy relationships. A young person who was previously fostered is currently working on increasing children's participation in the agency. Their goal is to ensure that children are supported effectively and heard.

Older children benefit from effective cohesive arrangements that help them make a smooth transition into adulthood. Older children learn independent living skills, and they receive relevant guidance from the agency. Young people can maintain their relationships once they move on, which provides them with valued ongoing support.

Children who speak English as an additional language benefit from translated welcome information and children's guides. One young person highlighted the importance of having a continued connection to their culture. Where possible, children live with foster carers who reflect their culture. However, when there are

challenges in securing appropriate culturally matched foster families, the placement planning process does not highlight how these issues will be addressed.

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

Children benefit from good safeguarding arrangements.

Children's safety is maintained. Currently, children do not go missing from their homes, so the risk of radicalisation or exploitation is reduced. The agency consults relevant agencies to ensure that safeguarding incidents are managed effectively. Ofsted is appropriately informed of significant events.

Children have meaningful support plans that consider their individual needs and incorporate their known risks. The organisation identifies, understands and manages risks effectively. Foster carers and relevant individuals in the fostering household benefit from safeguarding training.

Foster homes provide a stable base for children. Children benefit from structured routines and caring and consistent boundaries.

Foster carers benefit from a range of trauma-informed training that includes therapeutic parenting. Support groups and ongoing supervision are used to embed the thinking through a therapeutic lens. The agency funds additional psychological support to help foster carers understand the children's needs and develop further strategies to inform their practice.

Children learn to manage their emotions more effectively. Children no longer self-harm, and they view their foster homes as safe havens. Foster carers use research-based therapeutic parenting to respond to children's complex needs positively. Stable, trauma-informed foster care rebuilds trust, regulates emotional distress and enables children's safe progression to independence.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that children live in stable homes. Professionals commend the fact that children quickly settle into their foster homes. Regular monitoring of children's stability in their fostering household quickly identifies any challenges. This ensures that any difficulties are addressed quickly and efficiently. Staff use a range of interventions to ensure that all actions benefit children.

A recommendation to improve recruitment practice was raised at the last inspection. While leaders and managers have taken some steps to address it, they have missed an opportunity to carry out further recruitment checks and seek additional references when a staff member's role changed in the organisation. Furthermore, leaders and managers have failed to record the known reasons for a gap in the employment history for one member of staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The characteristics of good leadership and management are now in place. The agency benefits from visible, proactive leaders and managers. They pride themselves on the small family-style atmosphere and work well as a team to promote positive outcomes for children. A commissioner described the agency as 'very helpful' and praised the high-quality carers and the good outcomes children achieve. Foster carer recruitment is led by a very engaging individual who is well suited to their role.

Leaders and managers are solution focused. If necessary, they assist in supporting foster carers and staff members. The service is nimble and quickly adapts to meet children's and foster carers' needs. Leaders and managers meet regularly, and these meetings include monitoring trends, patterns and children's progress. There is a culture of learning from concerns and challenges that contributes to the service's development.

The responsible individual plays an active part in the agency, and they have a strong working relationship with the registered manager. The registered manager's tenacity, flexibility, determination and therapeutic mindset have stabilised the agency and have been instrumental in its continued growth. The panel chair highlighted that the agency is in a strong place and said that it is led by individuals who genuinely want the best for children and want to support carers effectively.

The fostering panel carefully considers the strengths and vulnerabilities of applicants, and decision-making focuses on children's best interests. The panel consists of a range of culturally diverse professionals. The panel chair is an individual with relevant fostering experience, and they demonstrate a good understanding of the role and expectations. A new agency decision-maker has been appointed; this social work professional is highly experienced and brings a fresh perspective to the role.

Foster carers have access to a range of training, and additional learning opportunities are provided in their support groups. The training programme reflects a culture of learning, accountability and high aspirations for every child. Bespoke support is tailored to the individual needs of foster carers. Carers benefit from newsletters and reflective support groups. The end-of-year event also provides an opportunity to recognise and celebrate foster carers' achievements.

Feedback from foster carers is variable. Most feel well supported in their role. However, some do not believe their individual needs are adequately considered. Leaders and managers are aware of the challenges. However, it is not explicitly clear how these have been considered during the planning stage and how leaders and managers have continually reminded foster carers of the support available to them. It is the expectation that foster carers complete their vocational training within their first year of fostering. This has not always happened.

Foster carers have not always benefited from being supervised by a competent and suitably qualified social worker. The situation has improved, as an experienced

interim supervising social worker is currently covering this role until the permanent post is filled. Foster carers are enhancing their skills through regular, comprehensive reflective discussions. Action plans enable carers to focus on their areas of development to ensure that they are meeting the required expectations.

When children's records are maintained, they highlight children's strengths and positive qualities. A young person said that they had sat down and written their logs with their foster carer. However, some children do not have meaningful records of their lives because their foster carers fail to maintain them. Furthermore, some foster carers have not fully used the trauma-informed training effectively to ensure that the positive way that they describe children is included in their records.

Leaders and managers monitor the necessary regulatory information. However, the quality of care report does not include their consultation with children, foster carers and placing authorities. This is a missed opportunity to gather wider feedback on how the service could be developed and showcase any external compliments.

Leaders and managers are aware of their strengths and areas for further development. There is a good vision for the future, and plans are centred on improving children's lives. The agency's strengths significantly outweigh the shortfalls. The agency has made a positive journey since the last inspection, and there is a strong foundation to improve further.

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 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. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3))	1 April 2026

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their cultural heritage. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including through written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practices. In particular, where a person's role changes, an updated reference should be requested from their current employer. A written record should also be kept of the reasons for gaps in employment history. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.2)

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers provide evidence of meeting the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.3)
- The registered person should ensure that staff and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files. In particular, recordings about children should be trauma informed and up to date, and they should provide a good overview of children's experiences. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)

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: 2605955

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Inspector

Sharon Payne, Social Care Inspector

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