

Empower Fostering Limited

Empower Fostering Limited

Unit 2 Prockters Farm Offices, West Monkton, Taunton, Somerset TA2 8QN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Empower Fostering is an independent fostering agency. Its statement of purpose states that it provides foster care placements and support packages according to identified need. The agency aims to offer children and young people a stable and consistent experience of family life, and to maximise their life opportunities.

The agency was registered with Ofsted in February 2021. There is a new manager in post. They registered with Ofsted on 9 August 2024.

At the time of this inspection, there were 11 children living in 10 fostering households. Two children were spoken to during this inspection.

Inspection dates: 18 to 21 November 2024

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 February 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 live in stable homes. Children leaving their care arrangements in an unplanned way is rare. This stability helps children to develop loving and trusting relationships with their foster carers. Children spoken to during this inspection identified their foster carers as trusted adults in their lives and a child described feeling loved by their foster carer.

Foster carers are committed to providing children with a sense of permanence and belonging. Children are fully included in their foster carers' lives. They attend family events, trips away, and holidays abroad with them.

Children's education is valued. Foster carers support children to be ambitious about their futures and they help them to fulfil their potential. For example, one child who has not previously attended school is now making academic progress, one child is completing an apprenticeship successfully, and one child's foster carer is exploring an education provision for them that will better support their talents.

Children have access to a range of leisure activities. This includes children attending scouts, rugby, and football clubs. One child has enjoyed a Halloween party in their home with friends and another child was bursting with pride when talking about their award for 'man of the match'. In addition, children enjoy activities and events facilitated by the agency, although they wish to be more involved in the planning of these events.

Children are involved with the agency's functions. For instance, the agency has created a young people's panel to fully include children in the recruitment of new foster carers. In addition, their views directly form part of the prospective foster carer's assessment. Children receive training to be able to fully participate in the panel. This helps children to build their confidence and to develop life-long skills.

Children are welcomed into their fostering families with considered planning. The agency collaborates with the child's placing authority effectively to arrange visits and sleepovers for the child before they move in. The agency thoughtfully gives the child a soft toy and information about their fostering family to help them to feel welcomed.

However, before a child moves to live with a foster carer, the agency does not always ensure that the foster carer receives the support required for them to fully understand the child's specific needs, including the nuances of a child's cultural needs.

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

There have been no significant or notifiable incidents reported by the agency. For instance, no children have been missing from their home and no allegations have been made by children about their foster carers.

Restraint is used for one child to prevent harm to others. The registered manager has improved the agency's systems to ensure that there is a robust approach to the reporting and review of restraint used. In addition, they have forged links with the Local Authority Designated Officer to increase scrutiny of these events.

Foster carers receive relevant training to care for children safely. This includes training to de-escalate incidents effectively. Foster carers use boundaries and nurturing approaches. They help children to repair relationships and to move forward from difficulties that have occurred.

However, not all carers receive additional training to equip them with in-depth knowledge and skills relating to risk management strategies. This includes training to help foster carers to keep abreast of the risks for children online.

The agency's safer care plans and risk assessments do not consistently detail all identified risks or provide clear guidance to foster carers about the steps that they should take to respond to concerns. This includes detailing risks and actions relating to self-harm concerns, and to increase children's sense of safety in the home.

Safer recruitment procedures are in place to reduce the risk of unsuitable persons being employed by the agency. However, there are inconsistencies in how information is recorded and stored. In addition, the agency's safer recruitment policy lacks detail about additional checks that may be needed when a person has lived overseas.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed effectively by the registered manager. In the short period that they have been in post, they have made positive changes to improve the quality of recruitment, assessment, training, and support delivered by the agency. In addition, monitoring systems have improved to track children's progress more effectively. The manager's oversight is also evident across records.

Managers use learning from practice to improve the care and experiences of children. However, this is not fully embedded, and some actions have not progressed. This includes learning from the fostering panel and actions to improve the agency's out of hours system to ensure that this is helpful to foster carers from the first point of contact.

The manager provides effective support and challenge to staff, including through team meetings and formal supervision sessions. Staff are positive about their experiences of working for the agency. They receive regular and effective supervision that focuses on the child's needs and care. Supervision is comprehensive and it is recorded effectively.

Since the registered manager has been in post, they have taken action to follow-up concerns for children who have experienced delay in accessing services and support,

in line with their care plan. However, the agency has not taken sufficient action for all children. For some children, delay in accessing specialist support is detrimental to their well-being.

Foster carers are visited regularly by their social workers, who are overwhelmingly positive about the support that they receive. However, supervision meeting records do not consistently demonstrate that the guidance given to foster carers' supports children's well-being and safety effectively.

Foster carers' feedback is extremely positive about the agency. They value the size of the agency that strengthens their network and the support that they receive. They describe their social workers as 'amazing'. Foster carers said that they feel valued by the agency, as do the children in their family, which is important to them.

Foster carers are provided with respite care when this is required. They stay with foster carers known to them and positive relationships have developed. For one child, they are cared for in their home by the agency's wider network of support workers due to their specific needs. For a few children, on occasion, care has previously been provided by the agency's support workers away from their homes. Managers said that these arrangements were agreed with the children's placing authorities.

The fostering panel and the agency's decision maker provide rigorous scrutiny to inform appropriate decisions about the suitability of new foster carers. Prospective foster carer assessments provide a comprehensive analysis of their strengths and vulnerabilities. Any gaps that are identified are fully explored in subsequent decision-making processes. Panel minutes are recorded clearly and detail the rationale for recommendations made.

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

Statutory requirement

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 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, the registered person must ensure that safer care plans and risk assessments detail identified risks and provide clear guidance to foster carers about the steps that they should take to respond to concerns.	31 December 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that before a child moves in, the foster carer's capabilities to meet the child's needs are fully assessed. Where gaps are identified, the agency should work with the responsible authority to ensure that the placement plan sets out any additional, training, resource, or support required. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for all staff. In particular, the agency's safer recruitment policy should detail any additional checks that are needed for persons who have lived outside of the UK. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 19.3)
- The registered person should ensure there is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers from the first point of contact. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.3).
- The registered person should ensure that supervisory social worker visit records demonstrate that guidance given to foster carers to support children's safety and well-being is reviewed effectively, and action taken to address any gaps identified. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8).

- The registered person should ensure that they challenge services promptly when there is delay for children in receiving specialist support, in line with their care plan. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.2).

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: 2616251

Registered provider: Empower Fostering Limited

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Inspectors

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector
Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector

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