

Assured Fostering

Assured Fostering Limited

Suite 7, 1–3 The Courtyard, Calvin Street, Bolton BL1 8PB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is owned and operated by a private provider and was registered with Ofsted in March 2023. The agency provides the following types of placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had two approved fostering households who were caring for five children.

The manager of this agency registered with Ofsted in May 2024.

This inspection was completed on site. Inspectors spoke with foster carers, and received written or video feedback from children. Inspectors spoke with professionals via phone call and/or email.

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 September 2024

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: not previously inspected

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: good

Professionals have noticed a marked improvement in the presentation and progress of children since they moved to live with their current carers. One social worker said: 'It's unbelievable how well the children have settled and the progress they're making... the carers have done an absolutely amazing job.'

Carers support children to spend time with their family. Children feel safe and supported in their foster homes. One child has started seeing a parent whom they had previously refused to see. This demonstrates that children are supported to maintain important relationships and understand their family identity.

Carers take children to new places and encourage them to try different things. One child said that the best thing about living with their carers was 'lots of activities', while another said 'trying new things'. This helps children to develop their interests and experiences.

Foster carers ensure that children's health needs are met. Carers support children to develop healthier eating habits and are proactive in contacting professionals when they have concerns about children's health. In addition, the agency has an in-house therapist who provides training and guidance to foster carers to help them better understand children's emotional needs.

The agency has plans in place to further develop foster carer support groups and children's activity days in the coming months. This will support carers and children to build their informal support networks.

Professionals, staff and carers comment on the warmth and support in the agency, from the top down. One professional said: 'I think [the agency] are absolutely amazing. The support and nurture the agency give to the carers is reflected in the care the carers give to these children.'

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

Children feel safe living with their foster carers and describe their carers as 'nice' and 'kind'. Foster carers have developed warm and trusting relationships with children, which has helped children to settle in well. As a result of these positive relationships, children feel able to speak to their carers if they have any worries.

The agency completes robust assessments of prospective carers with good exploration of applicants' backgrounds, their motivation to foster and their views on behaviour management. Assessing social workers consider the views of birth children in the carer household as well as how they may be impacted. This ensures that families who foster for the agency are child-focused and suitable to care for vulnerable children.

The fostering panel is made up of a diverse group who bring varied perspectives from their professional and personal experience. Panel oversight is strong and child-centred. Issues considered within panel are specific to each family and assessment. The agency decision-maker takes varied information into consideration and provides clear rationale for their recommendations. This provides added scrutiny to the approval of foster carers.

Foster carers receive regular supervision that enables them to reflect on the needs of each child they care for. Carers feel safe seeking additional support from the agency and know whom to contact when they have queries. Carers describe support at all levels of the agency as 'excellent'.

The agency completes unannounced visits shortly after children move in to ensure that children are settling in and being well looked after. Children are seen and spoken to individually at each unannounced visit. This enables children to raise concerns should they have any.

Professionals say that communication is excellent from foster carers and the agency. Professionals are kept up to date about the children and any concerns carers may have. One social worker said: 'Communication has been very good, always responsive and accurate.'

Foster carers are provided with useful training that helps them to understand and support the children they care for. One foster carer said: 'I feel like we were prepared from the get-go,' while another said: 'Training was really good, definitely something that's helped me with the children.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager is experienced and has the skills and understanding required to lead the agency successfully. The manager maintains excellent oversight of families undergoing assessment and knows their strengths and vulnerabilities well.

The manager holds regular supervision sessions with her staff team which provide a space for staff to reflect on their practice and discuss their cases. However, the supervision sessions for the registered manager are not regular and do not consistently have signed written records of the sessions.

Staff value the opportunity to come together as a group, formally through monthly team meetings, but also in weekly informal catch-ups. Team meetings and managers' meetings consider a range of information from different perspectives to ensure thorough discussion and oversight.

Staff feel valued by the management team and say that their ideas are welcomed. One member of staff said: 'I think the leadership here is genuinely second to none. I've never felt as valued as I feel here.'

Placing authorities commend the agency on their flexible approach and willingness to work in the best interests of the children. When children have been placed in emergencies, managers have gone above and beyond to ensure foster carers have the equipment they need to care for the children safely.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept of all supervision sessions conducted within the fostering service. These should detail the discussions held as well as the time, date and length of each supervision session for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff following the supervision session. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 24.5)

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: 2715638

Registered provider: Assured Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: The Courtyard, 1–3 Calvin Street, Bolton BL1 8PB

Responsible individual: Rukhsana Amla

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Inspector

Aislinn Cooper, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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