

Inspire Fostering Ltd

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Link 665 Business Centre, Todd Hall Road, Haslingden, Rossendale BB4 5HU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted in August 2023. A new manager has recently been appointed and has submitted her application to register with Ofsted.

The agency provides short-term, long-term, emergency, and respite foster care, specialist placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and homes for siblings to live together. It is responsible for the assessment, approval, training, supervision, and support of foster carers.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was supporting 11 approved fostering households that are providing care to 23 children.

Inspection dates: 7 to 10 May 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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides good-quality care to children, who experience and receive individualised care and support. Foster carers are skilled in helping children to develop family-like bonds. This supports children to build and develop trusting and loving relationships with carers.

Careful consideration is made to ensure that children are well matched in relation to their specific needs, with the skill set of their foster carers. This results in placement stability, and placement disruptions are rare. One professional said that she feels that the children's progress is 'absolutely amazing in the short time they have been there'.

Observations of foster carers with children are warm, caring, and nurturing. One child's feedback about their foster carers was, 'They are amazing foster carers; all that I could wish for'. Another child said, 'They are kind, caring, and always there for me. We all love each other and can be ourselves at home.' Foster carers help children to feel loved and valued.

The agency is committed to ensuring that children's cultural and identity needs are promoted and respected. Children are provided with a children's guide that they can read and understand in their first language. Children's guides are also age-appropriate and child focused.

Children's physical and emotional needs are met well. For example, children are helped to improve their health and manage lifelong conditions. Foster carers support children with health appointments and, where appropriate, support them to manage their own medication.

Foster carers are supported extremely well. All foster carers spoke positively about the support that they receive, not only from their own supervising social worker, but the rest of the staff team. Carers spoke of the 'family feel' that the agency offers. Foster carers feel valued as professional carers.

Children's birth families are valued and are an important part of children's lives. Foster carers support these relationships in line with the children's care plans, and ensure that family life is pivotal to supporting family time with birth families.

Statutory documents are not on file for some children. While the agency has escalated missing documents, further challenge to the placing authorities has not occurred to ensure that documents are obtained for all children in a timely manner.

Foster carers recognise and encourage the children's interests and talents. The children enjoy attending a range of activities and clubs. This helps children to build social skills and develop their self-esteem. Children also enjoy a range of holidays that broaden their life experiences.

Detailed records, some of which are written to the child, capture each child's experiences and journey within their foster home. This is beneficial for children who choose to read their case records both now and in the future.

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

Children have developed trust in the people who care for them. They benefit from clear and consistent boundaries, and are able to share any worries or concerns that they may have. This means that foster carers have a good understanding of children's vulnerabilities and how best to meet their needs. Consequently, children feel safe, secure, and protected in their home.

There has been one safeguarding incident. This was shared with the appropriate agencies and was managed quickly and in accordance with statutory guidance. The local authority's designated officer deemed the agency's internal investigation to be a sufficiently thorough consideration of the allegations made.

Children's risk management plans are confusing and inconsistent. Information on the agency's recording systems does not correlate with children's actual risk management plans. Furthermore, risk plans lack clear strategies for foster carers to follow to mitigate and reduce risks. This reduces management oversight and does not ensure that children are cared for safely.

Children are receiving consistent help and support to manage and regulate their emotions and feelings. Carers are able to de-escalate behaviour and meet the children's needs. There have not been any occasions when foster carers have had to hold children to keep them and others safe, or any incidents of children going missing from their foster homes.

The recruitment of foster carers and staff follows robust safer recruitment procedures. This ensures that children are not cared for by adults who may pose a risk to their safety and well-being. However, the quality of the assessments of fostering applicants who are transferring into the agency is inconsistent and not robust. Children who are living with applicants have not routinely been spoken with, and areas of vulnerability are not always explored sufficiently. This has not currently impacted on children, but does not ensure that only those adults who are suitable to foster are approved by the agency.

Children are regularly seen by agency staff through unannounced visits and regular visits to the home. Children recognise supervising social workers as adults who they can talk with and trust. Children are aware of how to make complaints, but have not needed to do so.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There has been a recent change in manager, with the previous manager moving into the role of the agency decision-maker. The current manager has been involved with the agency since December 2023 and has been in post for three months prior to the inspection. Staff have felt supported throughout these changes and said that the manager is inclusive and staff morale is positive.

Monitoring by managers is ineffective. Significant shortfalls were identified in relation to the monitoring and review of the service. In particular, the manager does not have robust systems in place to monitor and review matters set out in schedule six. Monitoring does not routinely explore the quality and accuracy of records. For example, some records on the agency's computer systems are blank and have no information recorded. These shortfalls reduce the effectiveness of the quality of care provided to children and hinders opportunities for staff and foster carer learning.

The agency's staff and foster carers receive regular supervision, which is reflective, practice based, and meaningful. However, the manager has not had supervision since being in post and this hinders her learning and development. Team meetings are well attended by all staff members. The agenda is varied, but always includes discussions about the children.

Panel processes are not robust. Members of the central list bring suitable skills but, at times, do not demonstrate that they understand their roles and responsibilities to discharge the functions of panel. There is a lack of scrutiny, challenge and professional curiosity when gaps are identified in fostering assessments, and the suitability to foster recommendations are not always evidence based. Furthermore, one panel took place despite not being quorate, and the quality of panel minutes varies significantly. The shortfalls identified significantly reduce the effectiveness and safe functioning of the panel and limit the independent scrutiny of agency practice.

There is good multi-agency collaboration. Agency staff and foster carers build effective relationships with professionals who are external to the agency to ensure that children's needs are being met. Social work professionals and commissioners speak positively about the good quality of care provided to children.

Foster carers and their supervising social workers are strong advocates for the children who they care for. Issues or concerns are escalated appropriately to placing authorities to ensure that concerns are resolved.

Foster carers have access to online and face-to-face training. However, further work is required to ensure that all foster carers complete mandatory training, such as first aid and safeguarding, in a timely manner.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. The fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel. (Regulation 23 (1) (7)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that all members of the central list have the experience and expertise to understand their role when making recommendations in relation to applicants' suitability to foster. In addition, that panel minutes are consistent, reflect appropriate challenge and provide clear reasons for evidenced-based recommendations.	28 June 2024
No business may be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel— one member who is a social worker who has at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience. (Regulation 24 (1)(ii))	28 June 2024
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. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))	28 June 2024

In particular, the registered person must ensure that there are robust systems in place to monitor and review matters set out in schedule 6.

Furthermore, ensure that records on their computer systems are fully completed and contain accurate and relevant information, and that regular audits are in place.

In addition, escalation processes for obtaining statutory documents must be consistently followed.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements. In particular, they should ensure that children's individual risk management plans are clear and include clear strategies for foster carers to manage and reduce risks, and if the level of risk changes, that risk management plans are reviewed and updated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 4.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. They should ensure that the reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.7)
- Suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered manager. In particular, the registered manager should receive supervision to support their learning and development in their role. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 24.3)

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: 2727994

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Inspectors

Nicola Clements, Social Care Inspector
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