

First Steps Fostering Ltd

First Steps Fostering Ltd

70 Maple Leaf Business Park, Manston, Ramsgate CT12 5GD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered on the 6 September 2023. This is the first inspection of the agency. The agency specialises in parent and child foster placements.

At the time of the inspection, two children were living in three approved fostering households.

The registered manager has been in post since 6 September 2023.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 August 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: 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 children live with their parents in the fostering household while parenting assessments are carried out. Children and families receive high-quality individualised care and support. Foster carers know the children and their parents well, and they form trusting and secure relationships with them. This helps them understand the children's non-verbal communication and behaviours. This enables the children to reach their full potential for the time that they live with their foster carers.

Moves into and on from the foster household are well planned. Foster carers are given detailed information and care plans which support them in meeting the children's holistic needs. There is careful consideration of how each family's needs, risks and vulnerabilities will be met. Children and their parents are welcomed and embraced by their foster families and their lives are enriched through the opportunities and activities which are available to them.

Supervising social workers regularly visit foster families and know the foster children and their parents well. They have a thorough understanding of the children and how they are able to express their views about the care they receive. Foster carers and supervising social workers advocate for the children and families. Foster carers support the children to safely maintain important relationships and understanding of their identity through carefully considered and assessed family time.

Foster carers, professionals and parents meet regularly to consider any progress made and explore any challenges and difficulties that arise. These positive professional relationships between the adults around the child enable open, honest and sometimes difficult conversations to happen in a safe space. This helps parents develop more insight and understanding about their parental role. The children's guide and parents' guide provide clarity about how to complain.

Foster carers ensure that the children's health needs are known and understood. They make sure children receive specialist health care when required. The current cared for children are pre-school age. Foster carers provide, and ensure parents provide, the children with stimulating play, activities and experiences that positively support their development.

Foster carers keep photographs, journals and mementos of children's time in their care. The children and their parents are able to take these with them when they move on. This means children have the opportunity to better understand their early life experiences. It also allows children and parents to reflect on memorable moments.

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

Children live in homes which are safe, and they are protected from harm. Foster carers are prepared, supported and knowledgeable in how to respond to risk and matters of

concern. When issues arise there are timely, effective and appropriate responses that ensure children remain safe.

Foster carers understand the risks and vulnerabilities that are present. They are guided by detailed individual safety plans. These plans are reviewed and updated during regular multi-disciplinary meetings. This enables responsive risk management. Carers know what to do should children and/or parents go missing.

Relationships form early, prior to children moving to live with their foster families. Parents are encouraged to be fully engaged in the moving in process and to contribute to decisions made about their child's day-to-day care needs. Consequently, children and their parents trust their foster carers. They seek help, support and guidance from their carers when needed.

The agency ethos is to not use restraint or restrictive practices. Agency staff and foster carers are trained in how to manage difficult situations. Foster carers understand developmental stages and the effects of attachment. They regularly meet to explore techniques and strategies that support them to effectively manage behaviours.

The manager ensures that effective safer recruitment systems and processes are in place. They ensure regular oversight of foster carers homes in order to ensure that they remain appropriate and safe. Any surveillance used is for clear reasons, within a clear framework and with the parents' consent.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The suitably experienced and qualified registered manager is currently undertaking a suitable level 5 leadership and management qualification. She ensures that the agency delivers care and support in line with the ethos and aims described in the statement of purpose. Managers, foster carers and staff are child focused and ambitious for children. They ensure that children receive high-quality care which meets their individual needs. Managers and staff ensure inclusive practice. They work in a non-judgemental, open and transparent manner.

The agency is properly staffed and resourced. Staff feel well supported. They benefit from regular effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences. Regular team meetings and access to a wide variety of training further support and equip staff for their roles. Managers and staff ensure inclusive practice.

Leaders and managers form effective relationships with partner professionals and voluntary groups. The building of relationships with local specialist services helps foster carers and parents better meet children's needs.

Foster carers are recruited specifically to meet the needs of 'parent and child placements'. Prospective foster carers are carefully assessed and prepared for their fostering role. They are well supported via the intensive support, education, supervision, support groups and guidance they receive from their supervising social workers. This ensures that they are well equipped to provide this specialist and intensive support to

children and their parents. This is particularly important for carers who are new to fostering and specifically parent and child fostering. Foster carers said that they felt welcomed to the agency and were part of the 'First Steps Family'. Foster carers value the responsive out of hours support service and the one day a month for 'life admin', during which the staff provide child care.

The agency panel and agency decision-maker apply appropriate scrutiny and oversight. Panel membership is diverse and possesses the required knowledge and experience. However, panel minutes do not reflect a full account of the discussions held.

The manager regularly monitors the service. She has a clear understanding of agency's strengths and plans to address areas for improvement. Senior leaders are reflective. Any complaints or concerns are explored and feedback is sought. Leaders and managers seek to use learning from any carer resignations or placements which have ended sooner than planned. This has helped them identify what can be improved in the future to avoid these situations.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. ('Fostering services national minimum standards', 14.7)

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: 2732929

Registered provider: First Steps Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Unit 70 Maple Leaf Business Park, Manston, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5GD

Responsible individual: Hannah Copley

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Inspectors

Amanda Maxwell, Social Care Inspector

Steve Bailey, Social Care Inspector

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