

New Routes Fostering

Father Hudson's Society

Father Hudson's Society, Coventry Road, Coleshill, Birmingham B46 3FG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

New Routes Fostering is a small voluntary fostering service that has been operating since 1992. It is run by Father Hudson's Society and is based in Coleshill. Father Hudson's Society is a social care agency of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham and is a registered charity. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 19 children placed with 10 fostering households.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in December 2017.

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 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: 17 January 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 enjoy positive relationships with their foster carers. Several children have lived with their foster carers for many years and are part of the family, which helps them to feel a sense of belonging. Some foster carers have shown their commitment to the children they care for by exploring the possibility of adoption or special guardianship orders to provide the children with permanency.

Foster carers receive very good support from their supervising social workers. Low caseloads allow the social workers to dedicate time to each family and all carers receive regular supervision visits, with frequent discussions in between. Supervising social workers also get to know the children well. One foster carer said that they feel very well supported and that the child living with them has built a strong bond with their supervising social worker.

Children are supported to enjoy a range of activities and pursue hobbies. One child has progressed very well with their swimming lessons and has enjoyed achieving badges. Other children enjoy going to Cubs, Beavers and roller skating. Many of the children enjoy family holidays, in England and abroad. The agency also arranges different events for the foster families to enjoy, including Christmas theatre trips and a day trip to the seaside.

The agency provides care for some unaccompanied children who have travelled to England alone. The foster carer who provides this care is experienced and sensitive to the children's needs. They provide culturally appropriate food for the children and support them appropriately if they have a faith. The foster carer also supports children to learn about British culture and expectations. Although the children often have limited understanding of English, the carer has good communication systems in place and makes use of interpreters when needed.

Foster carers support children's education and build positive relationships with schools. One child made significant progress with their emotional resilience, thanks to the partnership working between the foster carers and school. Another child remained living with their carer longer than planned so that they could focus on their GCSE exams. When one child was struggling at school and did not want to progress to the local college, the foster carer worked with the child's social worker and the virtual school to identify an alternative course for the child, which they feel more positive about.

Foster carers support children to maintain relationships with people who are important to them. They facilitate meetings between children and their families, sometimes in complex situations. On one occasion, the strong bond between the foster carers and child helped when someone of importance to the child became ill. The foster carers were very sensitive to the child's emotional needs and helped them to understand what was happening to their relative. They were honest and realistic, which helped the child come to terms with what had happened.

Assessments of prospective foster carers are robust and are completed within appropriate timescales. The agency has added a children's activity session and a children's panel to their assessment process, which helps children involved with the agency to be part of recruiting new foster carers.

Children are in good health and attend health appointments. When children have specific health needs, the agency ensures that foster carers receive appropriate training so that they can safely meet the child's needs. However, there are occasions when children's records do not show if their health appointments have been kept up to date. In addition, although foster carers have had some guidance on medication management, not all carers have completed medication training. This training is now included in new foster carers' induction, and will need to be rolled out to all foster carers.

When considering the suitability of a foster carer to meet a child's needs, staff consider whether the foster carers have the appropriate skills and experience. However, it is not clear if they consider whether the child's needs are compatible with those of any children already living in the household.

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

Children know who to talk to when they have concerns. They feel confident to confide in their foster carers but also understand where else they can get support. The agency has made referrals for mentors and supported children to access community support groups. One child said that they could also speak to their safeguarding officer at school.

Foster carers understand online risks and they support children by having honest conversations about the risks. On one occasion, a foster carer became concerned about someone a child had met online. They took prompt action to gather further information and pass this on to other professionals. The foster carer's vigilance and curiosity helped to keep the child safe.

Foster carers manage children's behaviour well and the use of physical interventions by foster carers is rare. On the few occasions when a child has needed to be held, the foster carer's training helped to ensure the physical intervention was appropriate. Records are clear and foster carers' actions help to avoid situations escalating.

The manager takes concerns about foster carer practice seriously. When allegations are made, thorough investigations and work with children's placing authorities ensure that outcomes are clear and that children are kept safe.

Children rarely go missing from their foster home. When they do, foster carers respond quickly by alerting relevant professionals and trying to locate the child and return them home safely. However, guidance for foster carers and staff to follow when children go missing from home is not always linked to the local authority

protocols. This means that foster carers and staff do not have all the relevant information to follow and inform their practice. Managers took prompt action during the inspection to address this.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has been in the role for several years and knows the agency, staff and foster carers well. Due to the small size of the agency, both the manager and deputy manager take a hands-on approach and there is a real team effort to support foster carers. The agency has recently appointed a new responsible individual who brings a lot of experience and knowledge to the role.

Feedback from foster carers, professionals, staff and children is wholly positive. Staff say they feel happy at work due to the support from managers, and professionals say supervising social workers are very involved and proactive. One professional spoke warmly about the foster carers they work with and described them as her 'golden carers'. The agency has a family feel that is welcomed by all those who gave feedback.

The agency's foster panel is made up of experienced and knowledgeable individuals. Their consideration of assessments and foster carer reviews is thorough, and recommendations are reasoned. The agency decision-maker is experienced and provides effective scrutiny and challenge. This means that only suitable individuals are approved to become foster carers.

The registered manager is supporting the agency to implement a more therapeutic approach. Specialist training has been commissioned and is being delivered to all foster carers. One foster carer spoke about how it had helped them to support a child when their care plan was changed.

The quality of challenge to other professionals is inconsistent. On some occasions, the agency has challenged decisions when they do not feel they are in the best interests of children. In contrast, there is a lack of challenge when required information is not received from children's placing authorities and an acceptance that documents will not be received. As a result, staff do not always escalate matters or challenge the local authority. This means that some foster carers do not have all the information about children that they need. This was identified at the previous inspection but has not been addressed effectively.

The quality of foster carer records about children's daily lives is varied. Some carers' records are very comprehensive and give a very good overview of children's experiences. In contrast, other records are very basic, do not contain sufficient detail and are not completed on time. Some foster carers have not completed training on reporting and recording and supervising social workers have not always provided effective support and challenge to foster carers. As a result, not all records provide the information needed to help children to understand their early life experiences and time living with their foster carers.

The manager's use of monitoring systems is not always effective. Although there is good oversight of serious incidents, managers have not always identified shortfalls in some areas of practice and record-keeping. More robust monitoring is needed around carer training records, children's attendance at health appointments, carer recording and tracking of children's progress to help managers ensure that any shortfalls are identified and addressed quickly and effectively.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure the management of the service ensures that all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures. In particular, managers must take steps to assure themselves that children's records are current, that they reflect children's day-to-day experiences, that they set out how decisions about the suitability of children living together are made and that agency records contain all relevant information, including the child's placing authority plans. The manager must also ensure effective oversight of foster carers' training to ensure they receive the training and development they need. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.3)

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: SC034855

Registered provider: Father Hudson's Society

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Responsible individual: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Jackie Line, Social Care Inspector
Vicky Smith, Social Care Inspector

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