

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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SWIIS Foster Care, Severn House, Mandale Park, Belmont Industrial Estate, Durham
DH1 1TH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

SWIIS Foster Care Limited is a large family-owned independent fostering agency based in County Durham. It provides foster care placements used by several placing authorities. A range of placements are provided, including short-term, long-term, emergency and respite placements, as well as placements for parent and child and disabled children. The agency is responsible for the recruitment, training, and support of foster carers.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 56 fostering households with 70 children and young people living with these families. Seven young adults are accommodated under 'staying put' arrangements. These are arrangements that enable young adults over the age of 18 years to remain living with their foster carers.

The manager registered with Ofsted in May 2023.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 9 May 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children are at the heart of this agency. Children receive nurturing care that is individualised and child focused. Foster carers are committed and dedicated to providing therapeutic parenting to children. The manager, staff and foster carers share the same family-focused values. Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. One child said, 'I love living at my home and nothing could be better.'

Children thrive because they are embraced by their foster carers. Children are made to feel welcome and receive child-friendly profiles of their foster home before they move in. This helps to prepare children for their move. Children quickly develop relationships with the foster carer's own children and the wider family. Children say that they love being part of the family and enjoy family celebrations. The warmth and acceptance children receive help them to develop a sense of permanence and belonging. One child said, 'This is not just a house; this is my home.'

The agency understands the importance of permanence for children. Many children have stable arrangements and have lived with their foster carers for several years. Some foster carers look after brothers and sisters to enable children to continue to live together. This promotes children's identity and supports enduring relationships of siblings. Additionally, foster carers help children to stay connected with people who are important to them. This helps children to maintain strong family links.

Some children enjoy a 'stay over' with short break foster carers. Children refer to them as extensions of their family, such as 'nana.' Children get to know their short-break carers before they stay with them. This means that children are naturally cared for by people they know and who are familiar to them. Additionally, short-break carers receive thorough information about the children that they care for. This helps to ensure that children receive consistent and safe care.

Children's education and learning progress are at the forefront of the agency's practice. All children attend education and are meeting or exceeding age-related expectations. The specialist education adviser is tenacious and advocates on behalf of children's education rights. For example, the education adviser supported a child in school every week so that they could provide evidence for their education, health, and care plan (EHC plan). As a result, the EHC plan was agreed. This helps to ensure that the child has support available throughout their education. Children are helped with study and revision tasks and achieve qualifications at school. The education adviser helps children to visit and apply for college and training opportunities. This raises children's aspirations and increases their future life options.

The agency and foster carers celebrate children's successes and achievements. The agency uses creative and fun ways to engage children in learning. For example, the 'Big 5' challenge sets targets that are unique for each child. It helps them to develop skills, such as handwriting and independence skills. The agency sends individualised

letters and certificates to children in recognition of their achievements. Children thrive on the positive affirmation and praise. This increases children's confidence and self-esteem.

Children's health needs are consistently met. Carers ensure that children have access to universal and sexual health services. A dedicated specialist health adviser supports foster carers to advocate on behalf of children's health needs. The specialist adviser acts as the link person between foster carers and other health professionals. Their expertise helps to make referrals to specialist agencies easier for foster carers. Additionally, this helps to ensure that children receive the support that they need at the earliest opportunity. For some children, they have reduced their reliance on medication. Some children have improved physical mobility and increased independence and self-belief.

Children and foster carers enjoy having fun together at activities arranged by the agency. On some occasions, activities raise money for charities that the children choose. Children take the money raised to the charities and feel proud that they have helped others. This helps children to develop empathy and an understanding of other people's circumstances.

Children are regularly asked for their views. Some children are appointed as young ambassadors to help to develop the service. Children are asked about their short-break arrangements, activities, and their care plan. Some children chair their own care planning meetings. Consequently, children feel listened to and that their views are important.

Children can stay with their foster carers as part of 'staying put' arrangements. Foster carers speak to children about this at the earliest opportunity. This provides children with ongoing permanence and support. Foster carers help children to develop independence skills that will benefit them in adulthood. However, statutory pathway plans are not always obtained by the agency from the child's placing authority. This is a missed opportunity to formally plan children's living arrangements. Additionally, this does not help to reduce uncertainty for children or foster carers.

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

Children say that they like living at their home. Foster carers develop meaningful relationships with children that are based on care and respect. Children identify their foster carers as the people that they trust. Consequently, children are confident to seek help and support if they are concerned or worried. This helps children to experience safety and stability.

Children are carefully matched to their foster families. The management team and staff work cohesively with the agency's central placement team. The staff and placement team advocate on behalf of carers to ensure that they receive robust

information from the local authority before a child moves in. This helps to ensure that children live with carers who have the skills and knowledge to meet their needs.

One child has made exceptional progress in overcoming the effects of racism at school and in the community. These experiences affected the child's education attendance and emotional well-being. The foster carers showed unwavering dedication and support to help the child. The education adviser supported the child to return to school with appropriate safety measures in place. The agency completes thematic activities, for example 'Black Lives Matter.' This raises awareness for children and foster carers about important topics such as racism.

Foster carers understand children's needs and vulnerabilities. Some foster carers complete specialist training, for example health diagnosis or caring for children from different ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. Foster carers say that they are confident to request bespoke training if necessary. A dedicated behaviour support team provides advice and support to foster carers to respond to behaviours that challenge. There is a strong focus on stabilising the child's arrangements and upskilling foster carers. Consequently, children are rarely held to manage their behaviour, and foster carers help them to manage their own emotions.

Supervising social workers develop excellent relationships with the foster carers. Foster carers say that they feel supported by their allocated worker as well as other members of the team. A minimum of one annual unannounced visit and health and safety checks of the home take place. All areas of the home and outside space are checked to ensure that the home remains safe for children. Supervising social workers speak to children regularly. The children know who they are and identify them as a person that they trust.

The recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers is comprehensive. Independent social workers complete the assessments. Quality assurance processes are effective to address any concerns at the earliest opportunity. The manager shares learning with independent social workers to ensure that there is consistency across assessments. Prospective foster carers speak positively about the assessment process. Newly approved foster carers say that they continue to feel supported by their supervising social worker and other members of the team. Foster carers benefit from comprehensive training and support.

Allegations against foster carers are managed in a timely and effective way to ensure the safety of children. The manager works with safeguarding agencies to ensure that appropriate action is taken. Investigations are completed with diligence, and foster carers are returned to fostering panel for further independent oversight. Foster carers have access to external support mechanisms, which they are made aware of. This supports effective decision-making and suitability of foster carers.

The fostering panel is chaired by an experienced professional with a wealth of relevant experience. Panel members bring a range of knowledge and are representative. Panel members are child focused when making decisions and include questions directly from children. The agency decision-maker provides effective and

timely oversight of recommendations and provides appropriate challenge. This helps to ensure that foster carers are meeting standards to care for and keep children safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced manager. She is supported by a deputy manager, five experienced supervising social workers, specialist advisers and two business support staff. Staff morale is high, and staff say that they love their job. One of the strengths of the team is that staff work together cohesively. The staff team knows the children and foster carers well. This helps the staff to support each other.

The manager is dedicated and motivated to improve outcomes for children. The manager's knowledge of the children is exceptional. She has knowledge of children's progress, challenges, and successes. She demonstrates good practice of nurture and care that staff model in their practice. Senior managers are visible to foster carers and supervising social workers. Staff feel that their skills and knowledge are valued.

The culture of the agency is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for children. Decisions made about the development of the service are child focused to improve the quality of care that children receive. These values are shared by staff and foster carers. This means children are always at the centre of practice.

The agency has a culture of learning and progression. The manager promotes evidence-based research and current publications to improve practice. This includes contextual safeguarding, such as technological abuse and coercive control. The agency uses findings from research to make changes to policy and procedures. Theoretical models underpin the discussions of foster carer supervisions. Evidence-based practice is shared with foster carers to improve their records of children's experience.

Staff feel well supported and receive regular practice-related supervision. Staff reflect on and develop their practice. Actions that are set help to ensure that children's needs are met. Team meetings are held regularly. They include peer reflections to learn from practice, for example when allegations are made against carers. The lessons learned are shared with panel chair and members. Additionally, external professionals attend team meetings, such as from domestic abuse services. Staff use these opportunities to maintain their knowledge and support services available.

The agency commissions several independent reviewing officers. Reports are thorough and include detailed records about whether foster carers are meeting the required standards. Foster carer reviews are comprehensive, completed within timescales and include feedback and consultations.

The manager has strong working relationships with professionals and partner agencies. Collaborative working means that children receive coordinated care.

Feedback from others is overwhelmingly positive. However, the manager does not have effective systems in place to consult with children's family or people who are important to them. This is a missed opportunity to gain views that could help to develop the service.

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an 'eligible' child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan. In particular, make requests to placing authorities that pathway plans are started, and that children and foster carers receive a copy. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards,' 12.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings, and views of children and those significant to them are considered in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. In particular, have processes in place to seek the views of children's parents and family members. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards,' 1.7)

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: SC036081

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