

Acorn Fostering Services Limited

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80 Burleys Way, Leicester LE1 3BD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Acorn Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Leicester. The agency undertakes the assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers who provide a wide range of placements to children and young people, including short-term, long-term, parent and child and emergency placements. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 20 approved fostering households providing placements for 32 children and young people.

The manager is registered with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 April 2025

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: 29 April 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

Following the last inspection, compliance notices were issued under regulations 8 and 11. A monitoring visit took place on 18 June 2024. Ofsted were satisfied that both compliance notices had been met.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive good care from experienced and skilled foster carers. The dedication and compassion shown by foster carers enables children to build trusted relationships and develop a strong sense of security. Children live with their carers for significant periods of time and grow up in their care. There is a commitment to permanence and children being viewed as part of the family. This enables children to flourish and have a real sense of belonging.

Children are supported to do well in education. Foster carers and the agency have high aspirations for children. They encourage children to believe in themselves and be ambitious. Several children are excelling academically and are planning to continue their studies at university. This is commendable.

Children's health needs are well met by foster carers. Children attend routine health appointments at the dentists and opticians. Foster carers and supervising social workers are strong advocates for children, ensuring that they receive the necessary health assessments, investigations and diagnoses. Children's emotional health is also well supported. For example, one child is receiving specialist support from a clinical psychologist to address long-standing issues around soiling. As a result, children's overall health and well-being improve.

Children's voices are earnestly sought and considered. Children are regularly consulted by the agency and their views help to shape agency practice. Supervising social workers see children regularly. The agency's support worker also spends quality time with children, helping them to process their feelings and experiences, and to learn how to keep themselves safe.

Prospective foster carers are well supported and welcomed. There is a buddy system where established foster carers provide support and guidance to new carers coming through. Assessments are of good quality and preapproval training is meaningful and effective in preparing applicants for the fostering task. Children have been included in the recruitment process, allowing them to ask questions to perspective foster carers that are pertinent to their care experience.

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

The manager has made significant improvements since the last inspection. These improvements have increased safety for children. For example, there is a safeguarding register in place that robustly highlights and monitors all safeguarding concerns and patterns. This ensures that appropriate actions are taken, and that the relevant agencies are informed.

The manager and supervising social workers are quick to recognise emerging risks for children, particularly around exploitation. They appropriately challenge the wider system where needed to ensure that risks are known and effectively managed.

Children rarely go missing from home, which shows how settled they are with their foster carers. It also means that there is much less risk of exploitation and criminal activity. When children do go missing from home, foster carers respond well, and children return safely. One child who occasionally went missing from home has been supported effectively, and there have been no further incidents.

Foster carers keep children safe. The risks that children are exposed to are well understood by staff and carers. However, risk management and safer care plans do not contain enough detail about the risks identified or how foster carers should respond. This is an area for development.

The agency has notified relevant agencies about some serious incidents involving children. Some of these were allegations against foster carers. These were managed appropriately, and none were substantiated from this inspection period.

The necessary checks are carried out to ensure that staff are safely recruited. However, processes need to be strengthened as not all checks are undertaken robustly. For example, for one social worker, it wasn't possible to ascertain full employment history.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is a strong leader and has successfully driven up standards of care and practice. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and has taken decisive action to address these. The agency has retained foster carers, children and staff through a challenging period, which is a testament to the relationships they have established.

Staff are well trained and supported. Staff receive training which is tailored to the specific needs of the children and carers. For example, supervising social workers have accessed specialist training in issues around hoarding, and a foster parent and supervising social worker received training in caring for children withdrawing from substances.

The manager has robust oversight of the agency. He has effective systems in place to monitor the care of children. Managers complete regular audits, and these are checked and overseen by the responsible individual. There are examples where the manager has identified issues from these checks and has subsequently addressed concerns with foster carers and staff.

The panel functions well, and its members apply proportionate scrutiny before reaching their recommendations. Panel members receive appropriate training and are skilled in their remit. There is good diversity among panel members, including people from different backgrounds, ethnicities and work experience.

The manager works well in collaboration with other professionals. Multi-agency working could be further strengthened by ensuring that the agency is in receipt of

important local authority documentation, such as care plans. An escalation process has been developed during the inspection and needs time to be embedded into practice

Staff benefit from regular supervision, which includes reflective discussions about children, safeguarding and their own development. This could be strengthened further by regular discussions around staff well-being and personal support needs. The manager also receives regular supervision from the responsible individual. However, due to the responsible individual's dual role of agency decision-maker, this limits the support the manager can access and receive. The agency acknowledged this during the inspection and have plans already in place to address this.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person and staff have access to support and advice, and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. (Fostering services: national minimum standards, page 49, paragraph 24.3 and 24.4)
- The registered person should ensure that where there is an agency placement, the agency works with the responsible authority to ensure effective integration of information held in the agency's case files and those of the responsible authority. (Fostering services: national minimum standards, page 53, paragraph 26.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (Fostering services: national minimum standards, page 14, paragraph 4.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This includes CRB checks. (Fostering services: national minimum standards, page 38, paragraph 19.2)

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: SC060131

Registered provider: Acorn Fostering Services Limited

Registered provider address: ASRA Conference Centre, 80 Burleys Way,
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Responsible individual: Shadab Ahmad

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Inspectors

Emma Dacres, Social Care Inspector
Louise Copping, Social Care Inspector

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