

Fostering Matters Ltd

Fostering Matters Limited

10 College Green, Gloucester GL1 2LX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Matters is a small, privately owned independent fostering agency. This agency provides a range of fostering services, including the placement of sibling groups, parent and child arrangements and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There are currently 45 children placed and 29 approved foster carer households.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 25 August 2022.

We last visited this setting on 1 November 2021 to 5 November 2021 to carry out a full inspection. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 January 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: 1 November 2021

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 benefit from living in stable and loving families, with carers who view the children as members of their own family. Children said that they enjoy living with their foster carers, citing the clubs they attend, the family pets, and spending time with other fostered children as some of the highlights.

Carers are strong advocates for children and fulfil their roles with passion and commitment to the children in their care.

Staff are equally passionate and energised by their work and are readily available to carers, whom they know well. There is a mutual respect between the agency and their carers. Carers regularly referred to the personal and family feel of the organisation, which is what initially attracted them to foster with the agency.

Children attend local clubs and pursue their interests. Carers champion their strengths, talents and interests. Children are also exposed to new experiences to expand and enrich their lives. For example, the agency has contributed to a child's school trip to travel abroad. Other foster carers have travelled with children to further explore their identity and birth heritage.

There is an underlying respect and understanding of children's culture, for example ensuring children's dietary requirements are met in line with their faith. Carers support opportunities for prayer and associated religious practices, such as attending the local mosque.

Children receive support tailored to their needs and interests, which is provided by a support worker. This includes the birth child of a fostering family who benefits from one-to-one time away from the family home.

The agency is supportive of children remaining with carers beyond their 18th birthday with 'staying put' arrangements. It supports carers to navigate these processes with the relevant local authorities.

Children's achievements and milestones are celebrated by the agency. Children receive a newsletter where their achievements are acknowledged as well as receiving certificates and vouchers. Their progress is captured in the context of their starting point and personalised to their abilities. Similarly, children are held in mind by staff throughout the year and all children receive advent calendars at Christmas time.

The agency is developing its recruitment strategy for foster carers and has seen an increase in initial visits and assessments. The assessment of foster carers report (Form F) sampled contained good analysis.

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

Safeguarding matters are well responded to by leaders and managers. The registered manager is highly skilled and knowledgeable in managing risk and has strong working relationships with partner agencies in the interest of safeguarding children. There is quick and effective action taken when a safeguarding incident arises. Where further investigations need to be undertaken, the manager and staff member will often complete this work together, providing sound management oversight and a deep understanding of the complexities and nuance of the situation.

Learning from incidents is key within this agency and several examples were noted throughout the inspection. For example, staff and panel members alike commented on the value of a joint training day following a safeguarding matter that was presented to panel. This training helped attendees develop a deeper breadth of knowledge around safeguarding, roles and processes both internally and externally. Furthermore, agreed changes to the agency's practices were developed and are now in place as a result.

The agency's out-of-hours system works well and carers consistently reported that they never have an issue being able to contact staff when needed. Carers felt that staff know them and their children well, so it is not an issue if their allocated social worker is not on duty that day, as responses are consistent and supportive.

While safeguarding practice is strong, not all the children's or carers' records capture the agreed safety plan or the expected actions of the carer in response to known risks. Similarly, while the agency has a no restraint policy, records need to be explicit in what this means, particularly in cases where children may need to be guided to safety or blocked to prevent harm to themselves and others and be given the training and skills to manage such scenarios. This theme is seen again within supervising social work visits, which do not always promote reflection and explore any concerns with carers following incidents. This does not promote learning or strengthen the capacity of carers to meet children's needs.

The agency has a small number of carers who concentrate on caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and, in doing so, have developed a specialism and area of expertise. They are linked in with local specialist services to keep up to date with changing legislation and best support guidance for the children in their care.

Children's guides are provided to welcome all children into the agency but are not yet routinely translated for children who do not speak English, although this can be achieved quickly online.

The agency does not currently employ a medical adviser to interpret medical reports with a fostering lens. In one case, the medical adviser had been named as the director, who is not medically qualified. During the inspection, leaders and managers

stated that they will seek to rectify this practice so that the agency and panel members have the reports medically interpreted by a qualified medical adviser.

The agency has very few unplanned endings for children. Of those that have occurred, these were predominantly due to safeguarding concerns that would have been difficult to foresee. Nonetheless, learning opportunities and reflections occur when a child has moved unexpectedly.

There are systems in place to ensure carers and staff remain up to date with training and have access to training that is reflective of their needs and on topics relevant to the children in their care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by a skilled and experienced manager. Staff attribute the positive changes within the agency to her appointment and value the wealth of knowledge she brings as well as her hands-on approach. She is much respected by the team and carers alike. External professionals also speak highly of the manager's accessibility and role in multi-agency working.

The manager has strong oversight of the social work practice as well as being very familiar with the intricate details of a carers and child's life. Her oversight of practice is very evident, and she is heavily involved in decision-making within case work. The registered manager completes regular supervision with the supervising social workers which is reflective and promotes good practice. For example, each family on the social worker's caseload is reviewed and their evolving support needs are considered. Children's needs are also at the forefront of this process.

Panel members bring a range of diverse experiences to the role and while they feel part of the agency, are clear that they are independent and offer good scrutiny. Panel members receive relevant training and are appraised each year. The agency decision-maker appraises the panel chair and receives feedback from various sources to complete this task. However, the agency decision-maker does not routinely observe panel for the purpose of appraising the chair.

The manager and staff team have strong working relationships with external professionals. Feedback received often cited strong commitment from the agency, good collaboration and genuine, meaningful support for the carers and children.

There are processes in place for children to provide feedback to the agency about the care they receive and how they feel about their carers as part of the annual review process. The forms have been developed to be more accessible and child centred. However, outside of this process children's voices are not always meaningfully captured, such as during supervision of the carer when children are present. Furthermore, there is at times an overreliance on virtual visits and meetings. This restricts opportunities for meaningful interactions with children and the ability to capture their voice and to fully assess the home environment.

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

Statutory requirements

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

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 13.1) In particular, where the agency has a no restraint policy, the child's plans must be explicit in stating how carers are to respond to behaviours and actions of a child that they may need to block or guide the child to prevent harm. This should be bolstered by specific training for the carers. Also, children's safe care plans should be a live document that names the risk and is clear on the expected response of the carer to reduce or manage the risk.	30 April 2025
In considering what recommendation to make under paragraph (1), the fostering panel— must consider and take into account all of the information passed to it in accordance with regulation 26, 27 or 28 (as the case may be), may request the fostering service provider to obtain any other relevant information or to provide such other assistance as the fostering panel considers necessary, and may obtain such legal advice or medical advice it considers necessary. (Regulation 25 (2)(a)(b)(d)) In particular, the agency should commission a qualified medical adviser to interpret medical reports, keeping in mind the fostering task, and include their comments within reports for panel's consideration.	14 March 2025

Recommendations

- The registered manager should ensure that children and their home environment are seen regularly and that these occasions are captured accurately. Children's thoughts, wishes and feelings should be recorded in a meaningful way in the records. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 8, paragraph 1.3)
- The registered manager should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair, and for this purpose may attend a proportion of panel meetings but only as an observer. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', page 41, paragraph 5.15)

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: SC061740

Registered provider: Fostering Matters Limited

Registered provider address: Unit 7, Malvern View Business Park, Stella Way,
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Inspectors

Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector
Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

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