

Phoenix Fostering

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Queens Meadow, Wigmore, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 9UZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private company operates this fostering agency providing long-term and short-term care. The vast majority of carers are approved for one child.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for 21 children living in 18 households.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 31 January to 4 February 2022

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: 8 January 2018

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 thrive and make good progress from their starting points. Most of the children placed with this agency have lived with their foster carers for many years. This is because they share trusting relationships with their foster carers. A child informed the inspector that they feel part of the family and feel very supported. These positive relationships help children to feel safe and secure.

Foster carers describe receiving 'excellent' support from their supervising social workers. Foster carers advocate for children and the supervising social workers challenge children's placing authorities when needed. This helps to achieve individualised care and best outcomes for children.

Children's social workers value the support children receive from their foster carers. Foster carers and the agency recognise the importance of care planning to support children to feel secure in their placements now and in the future. Several children continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. They receive encouragement from their foster carers while they are studying or training, and learn the skills they need to be more independent. This supports children to prepare for adulthood.

Foster carers state that they feel welcomed and valued by the agency. Preparation training and assessments of potential foster carers are thorough. This helps to ensure that foster carers understand and are committed to the ethos of the agency and provide good care to children. Children contribute to their foster carer's annual reviews and this too makes children feel valued. It also informs the agency on how children view their experiences within their foster family.

Leaders provide children with plenty of opportunities to express their views through the agency's 'mind of my own' (MOMO) app. Through the MOMO app, family support workers consult children on all aspects of their care and support them to take increasing control of decisions that affect them.

A small number of children have moved placement in an unplanned way. However, they were supported in their moves and matched with other foster carers with the agency. As a result, children remain with the same support workers and receive consistent care throughout. In addition, this good support provides children with some reassurance and positive memories of their time living with their foster carers.

Children's health needs are met well by foster carers and the agency. Leaders and carers work effectively with others as part of a team to support the children that they care for. The agency is proactive in ensuring that children receive the specialist help and support required. For example, when one child needed therapeutic input to support their mental health and there were barriers from the child's placing authority, the agency funded therapy for the child themselves. This agency responds well in times of crisis to meet children's needs.

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

Foster carers understand risk for children and they are proactive in keeping children safe. Foster carers discuss their concerns, when necessary, with their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. The agency's behaviour specialist creates behaviour analysis reports which help with identifying patterns of behaviour and the potential reasons behind each behaviour displayed. This helps foster carers to implement appropriate care strategies, which ultimately reduces risk for children.

Managers, family support workers and supervising social workers all respond well to identified risks for children. The agency works well with partner agencies to monitor risk. The supervising social workers help to create individualised safe care assessments for foster carers, which are regularly reviewed. Foster carers are guided by the excellent positive behaviour support plans for each child and receive specific training which helps them to feel confident in understanding and minimising risk for children. Children placed with this agency are safe.

Children are supported to progress with independence skills in a safe and planned way. One child is encouraged to travel to college by bus and train as part of her independence. Family support workers further strengthen children's independence skills with the 'getting ready for adult life' workbook. Adults balance their support to encourage independence and confidence-building while ensuring that the child feels safe.

The fostering agency's panel chair ensures that assessments of prospective foster carers include all necessary checks and explore issues pertinent to fostering. Panel members prepare for panel by identifying areas of vulnerability to explore with the assessor and prospective foster carers. This provides robust consideration and recommendation of the prospective foster carer's suitability to foster.

The agency has an experienced agency decision-maker who is social work qualified, and provides a clear rationale when approving foster carers. This gives further assurance that foster carers who are recruited have the skills and resilience to care for children and keep them safe.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes and the number of incidents is low. On occasions when children have gone missing, the foster carers have responded appropriately and acted in line with the child's plans. Also, foster carers ensure that they notify and work with partner agencies. These actions help to promote and maintain children's welfare. However, children are not always provided with return home interviews. This means that children do not have the opportunity to discuss with an independent person concerns they may have about why they went missing from their foster home and what happened while they were away.

When appointing new staff, the management team has not consistently followed safe recruitment practice. For example, a full work history and verification of

previous roles with children have not always been checked. This means that the provider cannot always be fully assured that staff are suitable to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This agency is led by a manager and deputy manager who are ambitious for children and carers, and have a clear vision of where the agency is going. This vision is shared by the responsible individual and they have appointed staff who also share these values. The role of the therapeutic lead is fundamental in driving forward the trauma-informed, therapeutic approach that everyone wants. Because of the way this vision is communicated in all aspects of the agency's work, foster carers are providing good care and support. They are happy, feel supported and feel part of this journey.

Members of the management team are suitably qualified and experienced to lead the agency. They are child-focused, ambitious and place children at the heart of their decision-making. Children's placing social workers and foster carers appreciate the constant support, commitment and dedication of the supervising social workers and family support workers. A group of foster carers informed the inspector that the support they receive is 'fantastic' and 'the agency do try their best and really do care for these children'.

Leaders know key information about their foster carers and children. This is because agency staff take the time to regularly visit carers and children in their homes. In addition, the management team plans and holds events to bring everyone in the agency together. For example, there are craft days and discos run by foster carers which the children enjoy.

Staff and foster carers receive regular supervision. Supervision records show constant and effective challenge, direction and action. This demonstrates how effective oversight and leadership is improving the agency and its outcomes for children.

Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and take action to maintain its development. For example, child progress trackers are used to monitor and review children's progress. However, some of the monitoring systems developed are not yet fully embedded into practice. This means that the agency has experienced some delays in identifying shortfalls and gaps in recording systems. The registered manager does not have a process to escalate matters when documents are not returned in a timely way. This does not ensure that foster carers are provided with the information they require when caring for children.

The services provided accurately reflect the statement of purpose. The document describes the therapeutic, trauma-informed approach of the agency, which goes alongside positive behaviour support and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. However, the statement of purpose has not been updated since 2020 and does not incorporate the latest members of the team. Furthermore, it has not been sent to

Ofsted. This prevents the reader from having accurate information about the services offered by the agency.

The agency has not notified Ofsted about all cases of COVID-19 in a foster carer's household, in line with the guidance issued to providers about this.

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, 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— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, and notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4(a)(b)) This is in relation to keeping the statement of purpose under regular review and making the updated statement of purpose available to Ofsted.	31 March 2022
The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3)) This is in relation to the registered manager escalating effectively when there are delays in receiving statutory documentation and children receiving return home interviews from the child's placing authority.	31 March 2022

Recommendations

- 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, specifically with staff recruitment. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff should be trained in, understand and operate these good

practices. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 38, paragraph 19.2)

- The registered person should have a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system should include what to do when a notifiable event arises at the weekend. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 57, paragraph 29.1)

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: SC357652

Registered provider: Phoenix Fostering

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Inspector

Kev Brammer, Social Care Inspector

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