

Hope Fostering Services

Hope Fostering Services Limited

Castle Cavendish Enterprise Centre, 63–67 St Peters Street, Nottingham,
Nottinghamshire NG7 3EN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Hope Fostering Services is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Nottingham. It provides a wide range of placements, including emergency, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 21 fostering households, and 45 children were being cared for by its foster carers.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2019.

Foster carers and children were spoken to during the inspection.

Inspection dates: 2 to 6 December 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: 23 October 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are receiving good care from foster carers who understand their needs. Many children build enduring relationships and stay with their families for long periods of time. Children told us that they love living with their foster carers. They are helped with their education and achieving their goals. One child has just achieved very good GCSE results. They said this was because of the support they received from her foster carer. Another child has a full-time job. They have saved up and bought their own car. The length of placements supports children to prepare for adulthood. This happens organically as it would in any other family home.

Overall, carers are prepared well before children move in. Supervising social workers attend placement planning meetings, gather relevant information and carers can meet children's previous carers. This is helpful to get to know children and prepare for their arrival. Some children have moved on from foster families in difficult but unforeseen circumstances. The agency has supported these situations as best they can. There are good examples of foster carers staying in touch with children when they move. This helps children feel valued and supports meaningful transitions. The agency prioritises keeping siblings together where possible which is important for children's identity and stability.

Children enjoy a range of activities and holidays, this gives children opportunities to enjoy themselves, build confidence and have new experiences.

A real strength of the agency is meeting children's cultural needs in meaningful ways. Children from different cultures are supported by their foster carers to follow their faith and religion. Sanctuary seeking children have positive experiences and make good progress.

The manager and staff ensure that children's health needs are well met. They attend routine health appointments. Carers are alert to children's behaviours which can then be further assessed if they are affecting children's quality of life. An in-house psychologist supports the agency to understand the impact of children's trauma.

Disabled children benefit from good advocacy. One example is a carer who has ensured a child's school increased their understanding of their disability and presenting behaviours. This has resulted in the child having a much better school experience.

Foster carers are not always recording information about children in a helpful way. The quality of foster carer logs is of variable quality. Supervising social workers have not reviewed and shared all logs with the local authority in a timely way. This can limit the way that children's lives are documented and overseen.

Foster carer assessments contain relevant information, however there is limited content and analysis of applicants' capacity and resilience in terms of managing children's differing needs and behaviours. This impacts on applicants ability to fully understand the demands of the fostering role.

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

Managers and staff have worked together to improve the safeguarding of children since the last inspection. There have been notable changes such as increased management oversight of cases by leaders and managers. There is regular monitoring of significant events.

The agency has increased the frequency of unannounced visits to fostering households which is good practice. Visits are thorough and well recorded. Supervising social workers have increased their professional curiosity and are able to challenge carers more effectively. Children are seen regularly alone and with their foster carers. This enables them to build strong relationships with the supervising social workers, sharing their worries and concerns. These improvements have increased the accountability of carers and the safety of children.

The managers have taken appropriate actions in response to concerns raised about foster carers. This prevents children from living with unsuitable adults. A reflection day is planned to identify learning from recent de-registrations. This was recommended following a standards of care investigation. There has been some delay to this taking place which has impeded learning being implemented in a timely way.

The managers and social work staff have developed good risk assessments and safer care plans with foster carers and children. This demonstrates that they understand and respond to children's risks and vulnerabilities. There are helpful, child centred strategies in place to help keep children safe. When new risks emerge, these are responded to well and risk management plans are updated. There are some good responses to online risks. The manager has ensured that children are safe from ongoing exploitation. Foster carers are provided with training to help them understand the complexities of online risks.

The manager has not informed Ofsted of three incidents as required under regulation 36. This minimises opportunities for the regulator to have oversight of serious incidents involving children. Managers have accepted this and understand why they need to notify Ofsted.

Overall, new staff are recruited safely. The registered manager also acted on concerns which emerged about an existing employee and implemented a new system to monitor the ongoing suitability of independent social workers. However, there was one example where the agency did not have the relevant document to evidence a staff member's relevant qualification. This is required to meet the fostering national minimum standards.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager has worked very hard to meet the requirements and recommendations set at the last inspection. This is a significant achievement. She has been well supported by the responsible individual and team manager. The responsible individual has introduced positive strategies to the team which has helped to raise morale. The team manager has brought organisational skills and increased structure. This has enabled the registered manager to undertake her role in a more focused way. As a result, management performance has improved considerably with good evidence of this in children's records.

Leaders and managers have shown a strong commitment to improving practice. For example, more robust supervision of foster carers and social work staff. Safeguarding meetings and management audits have continued to provide close oversight of children's experiences when they are most vulnerable. This has resulted in a more responsive and timely approach to meeting children's needs.

The staff team have increased in confidence. They are demonstrating increased skills in professional curiosity and feel equipped to do their roles. Staff told us that they are well supported, clearer about agency processes and expectations of their practice. This has improved consistency across the team. The managers have developed a family support team providing children with opportunities for individual and group sessions. There is a clear referral process in place to enable focused work on specific issues.

The managers have formed a 'children's committee' which is in its early stages. This group is intended to strengthen children's participation and gather their views in a more organised way. Children of different ages are starting to attend and build their confidence in this new setting.

Managers have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. There is a current strategic improvement plan highlighting specific actions and goals. There is evidence of this being progressed. The agency recognises the need for more placements for sanctuary seeking children and they have the resources to develop this specialism. This shows the agency is responding to the needs of connected local authorities.

The manager has made significant changes to the fostering panel. There is a new chair, vice chairs and good diversity within the panel membership. The panel has strengthened their accountability and safeguarding role. The chair is setting clear actions and recommendations for the agency which are being implemented. There is a greater confidence in holding the agency to account.

The panel chair is very new in post, and he has identified some areas for development in terms of strengthening process and structure of panel functioning. For example, improving the quality assurance processes between panel and the fostering agency.

The agency decision maker is also relatively new. His consideration and recommendations are a force for improvement. Overall, the new panel and reviewing arrangements have strengthened the structure around the agency which is having a positive impact on children.

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

Statutory requirement

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

Requirement	Due date
If any of the events in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. This specifically relates to informing Ofsted of events listed under Schedule 7 where required to do so. (Regulation 36 (1)(2))	17 January 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that prospective foster carers are prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 28, paragraph 13.3).
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for foster carers and those working (including as volunteers) for the fostering service which includes:
 - checks to confirm qualifications which are a requirement and those that are considered by the fostering service to be relevant. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 38, paragraph 19.3).
- The registered person should ensure that there is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes reflective sessions following standards of care cases and practice issues arising. Any discussions should have accompanying records for future reference. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 47, paragraph 23.1).

- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring the quality assurance of matters considered by the panel and agency decision maker (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 50, paragraph 25.1).
- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 43, paragraph 26.6).
- The registered person should ensure that 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. This relates to ensuring that foster carer logs are shared in a timely way and that the agency receives records of children's review meetings (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards, page 53, paragraph 26.8).

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: SC367371

Registered provider: Hope Fostering Services Limited

Registered provider address: C/o Brockhurst Davies, 11 The Office Village, North Road, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 1QJ

Responsible individual: Glenda Holt

Registered manager: Karen Daley

Telephone number: 0115 9002795

Email address: info@hopefs.co.uk

Inspectors

Laura Walker, Social Care Inspector

Helen Gronhaug, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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