

Hope Fostering Services

Hope Fostering Services Limited

Castle Cavendish Works, Dorking Road, Radford, Nottingham NG7 5PN

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.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 25 fostering households, and 50 children were placed with its foster carers.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 February 2019

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	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 30 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children are making good progress in all areas of their lives. Their individual needs are well met, and they are happy and settled.
- Placement stability is very good, and this contributes significantly to positive outcomes and emotional well-being.
- Foster carers provide a high quality of care and they are very committed to the children who they look after. The agency supports and trains the foster carers well.
- Safeguarding is taken seriously, and the agency is fully aware of its responsibilities.
- Staff are well supported by the managers. Staff are dedicated and committed to providing a high level of support to foster carers and children.
- Partnership working is good. Social workers and commissioners speak highly of the good communication and flexibility of the agency.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The agency is understaffed and needs to recruit more supervising social workers to enable the managers to concentrate on the strategic development of the service and improve the monitoring and oversight. This includes ensuring that supervision records are signed by all parties.
- The documentation in relation to the appointment of panel members needs improvement. This includes appointment letters that detail the performance objectives and improved recording of recruitment checks.
- Foster carers' development plans should be updated annually and provide a clear record of expectations and how these are going to be met. In addition, the annual review should be timelier.
- The record of agency decision-making should follow the statutory guidance. Panel minutes that are clearer about the reasons for the recommendations of the fostering panel would support this.
- Systems to ensure that the assessment of risk in relation to bedroom sharing is properly documented, and that the correct procedures in relation to exemptions to the usual fostering limit are followed, need to be improved.

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 ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to— (a) the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it, and (b) the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19(a)(b) The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)	31/05/2019

Recommendations

- A written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (National minimum standard 24.5)
- The reviews of each carer's approval include an appraisal of performance against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. The foster carer's personal development plan is reviewed, and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated. Reviews take into account the views of each child currently placed with the foster carer. (National minimum standard 20.6)
- Approval of all foster carers must be reviewed, and a decision about suitability made, within a year of approval, and thereafter whenever it is felt necessary, but at intervals of no more than twelve months. (Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services page 18)
- 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:

- a. identity checks;
 - b. CRB Disclosures, including the level of the Disclosure, and the unique reference number (in line with eligibility to obtain such checks);
 - c. checks to confirm qualifications which are a requirement and those that are considered by the fostering service to be relevant;
 - d. at least two references, preferably one from a current employer, and where possible a statement from each referee as to their opinion of the person's suitability to work with children;
 - e. checks to confirm the right to work in the UK;
 - f. where the person has lived outside of the UK, further checks, as are considered appropriate, where obtaining a CRB Disclosure is not sufficient to establish suitability to work with children. (National minimum standard 19.4)
- Before appointing any panel member or including them on the central list, the fostering service should inform them in writing of their performance objectives, which should include participation in induction and training, and safeguarding the confidentiality of records and information submitted to the panel. Panel members should sign an acceptance form to record their agreement to these objectives. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services page 41, paragraph 5.14)
 - The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (National minimum standard 14.7)
 - Ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet* and *IRM (2009)* and approach a case accordingly. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 5.40)
 - In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed. (National minimum standard 10.6)
 - Schedule 7 to the Children Act 1989 (the 1989 Act) limits the number of children who may be fostered by a foster carer. The "usual fostering limit" is set at three. This means that no one may foster more than three children unless:
 - the foster children are all siblings in relation to each other, or
 - the local authority within whose area the foster carer lives exempts the foster carer from the usual fostering limit in relation to specific placements (in which case they must set out the terms as detailed below), and
 - the foster carer's terms of approval allow it (any terms of approval must be compatible with the number of children the foster carer is caring for even if an

exemption to the usual fostering limit has been granted, unless the placement is in an emergency and for less than six days). (Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services page 16)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children make good progress and have positive experiences because they are cared for by foster carers who provide care and support of a high quality. One social care professional said: 'The carers are absolutely fantastic and extremely supportive.' Foster carers are committed to the children and they understand their individual needs very well. A child's social worker commented: 'The foster carers are experienced and have shown a lot of insight into the different needs of all the children. All the children have blossomed in their care.'

Children are happy and settled. They have very positive relationships with their foster carers. One child said: 'I am very lucky because I've got the best mum.' A young person said of his foster carer: 'She is amazing. She is changing my life.' Children feel part of their foster carers' family and they are fully involved in family life. Children are also encouraged to develop their own interests and leisure pursuits such as swimming, dance, going to the gym and playing football. Children thrive because they are cared for and nurtured. A foster carer describing the progress of a child she is caring for said: 'He has gone from being shut down and withdrawn, with no self-esteem or confidence. He now has great capabilities, his confidence has gone through the roof, and he has blossomed into a wonderful young man.'

The children cared for by this agency have complex needs. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who have experienced significant trauma, form 10% of the current placements and there is also good provision for sibling groups of four and five children.

Placement stability is very good. There have been no unplanned placement endings this year, which compares very favourably to the national comparator of 9%. Over 50% of the children have been with their foster carers for over a year, and many of those children have lived with their foster carers for significantly longer. This placement stability contributes to successful outcomes, emotional stability and a sense of belonging. Foster carers also provide staying put arrangements and they maintain contact with children and young people who have moved on.

Children make good educational progress and, in some cases, this progress is excellent. Foster carers are committed to supporting children to attend school and they are sometimes involved in some very challenging and complex transport arrangements to facilitate this. The agency monitors children's school attendance and achievements; they all have school or college placements and they are all doing well. One young person is about to go to university.

Children are healthy. This is regularly monitored to ensure that children are accessing universal services. If children have emotional difficulties, carers work with the child and adolescent mental health service to support the plan of care consistently. Children have made good progress because of the foster carers' commitment and the consistency of care. A professional said of a child: 'He has made massive strides. He is socialising more, and his anxieties have reduced. This is testament to the supportive network and a safe base.'

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children make good progress. Foster carers have a really good understanding of their specific needs and are fully supportive of them, both practically and emotionally. These young people start to develop their language skills, they become more confident and they learn to be independent.

Children's participation is being developed with the help of a former looked after young person. The agency is keen to provide more social events for children, but also uses its expertise to develop aspects of the service, such as the foster carer review form. Children's views are taken seriously. Their contribution to foster carers' reviews has been improved because supervising social workers now go through the review form with the children and help them complete it.

There have been a limited number of foster carer approvals this year, and this is an area that the manager is keen to improve on. Foster carers feel welcomed when they contact the agency and they describe an efficient and clear preparation and assessment process. Assessments are thorough and timely and result in foster carers who are equipped to meet the needs of children.

Foster carers are very well supported, despite the recent changes and shortages of personnel. They speak highly of the agency, they feel involved in the decision-making, they say that the training is excellent, and they are appreciative of the out-of-hours service, which one foster carer described as 'brilliant'. Another foster carer said: 'I cannot fault the agency. I have not got a bad word to say about Hope.' Foster carers feel valued and listened to. They know that their views are important and are acted on whenever possible.

Foster carers are supported through regular supervision and also support groups. They have an annual foster carers' dinner, and Muslim carers, their fostered children and their birth children are invited to an Eid meal. There is also a Christmas party and a summer event to help foster carers maintain a positive connection with the agency, other foster carers and fostered children.

Matching children with the right foster carers is a priority. Foster carers are not pressured to take children whose needs they cannot meet. There is a good system for identifying the needs of children referred to the agency and for detailing how the prospective foster carer can meet those needs. Where possible, children have an introductory visit to the foster home before they move in. Children are provided with welcome packs that include the children's guide, so that they know what to expect from the agency. The agency is currently developing child-friendly profiles of foster carers to improve the introduction process.

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

Children are kept as safe as possible because foster carers are recruited safely, and they have regular and appropriate training in all aspects of safeguarding including child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and digital security. Foster carers understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe from all types of harm and they know what to do in the event of an incident or emergency.

Currently, children are not engaging in risk-taking behaviour, although this has been an issue for a small number of children in the past. The agency is proactive in contacting the local authority to express its concerns if it feels that risks are not being identified and minimised appropriately.

All children have individual risk assessments that are thorough and reviewed at least annually or when risks change or emerge. The foster carers also have safer care plans that are reviewed at least annually. These documents provide a structure for foster carers to understand the level and type of support and care that is required to keep children as safe as possible.

Foster carers have benefited from training in positive behaviour management. This was enhanced last year through a 10-week course in dyadic developmental psychotherapy that provided foster carers with a theoretical underpinning of therapeutic parenting. This enables them to understand why a child behaves in a certain way and supports them to react more therapeutically.

The agency understands its responsibilities when there are allegations or concerns about carers' practice. It seeks the advice of the designated officer of the relevant local authority and takes carers back to the fostering panel for an early review to consider their ongoing suitability. It acts robustly to ensure that foster carers remain suitable to foster.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Until recently, leaders and managers have not been as effective as they should have been. The service has experienced a number of staff changes, including a change of registered manager and the loss of some supervising social workers. Therefore, the staff complement is depleted. Managers are currently covering these shortfalls, but this has had an impact on the development of the agency and some aspects of monitoring. On a more positive note, the support of foster carers does not appear to have diminished and the foster carers have appreciated the consistency of two long-serving members of staff.

There is now a recently registered manager in post, who is appropriately qualified and experienced. She is supported by the team manager, who knows the agency well. The managers have a detailed and accurate understanding of the shortfalls and the strengths of the service. They are supported fully by the directors, who remain fully committed to improving the lives of children placed with the agency's foster carers. The manager is both child focused and ambitious to develop the service so that it provides the best possible care. There are clear plans to take things forward once the agency is fully staffed.

Managers know the children well and understand the progress that they are making. This is being enhanced by the implementation of a new electronic system that makes the recording of progress more systematic and visual.

The current staff team is small, but staff feel well supported by the managers. Staff describe a cohesive and supportive team that works together to support foster carers and children. Staff are regularly supervised and have access to relevant

training. However, the records of supervision are not always signed by both the supervisor and supervisee. This may have an impact on accountability.

Foster carers are supervised regularly and have access to relevant training of a high quality. All but one household have completed the training and development standards within the year. However, some foster carers have not had their personal development plans reviewed as frequently as they should have, and the current format lacks specificity about the agency's expectations and timescales. This is a missed opportunity to give a more thorough consideration of foster carers' developmental needs.

The foster carer review process has been strengthened by the appointment of an experienced and thorough independent reviewing officer who has a good understanding of her role. However, consideration needs to be given to the timing of the review, as the decision about ongoing suitability should be made within 12 months of approval and thereafter at intervals of no more than 12 months. Currently, the review takes place within 12 months but not the decision.

There is a properly constituted fostering panel chaired by an appropriately skilled and experienced independent person. The membership has been recently increased to include someone with personal experience of being looked after, and a foster carer. Therefore, the panel members are able to bring a variety of valuable viewpoints, both personal and professional, to their deliberations. There is evidence of challenge and scrutiny. It is administered well, and members receive the panel papers in good time so that they can consider them properly in preparation for the panel. Although the panel minutes are thorough and timely, they do not explicitly state the reasons for the recommendation. This would provide more clarity and aid the decision-making process.

There are shortfalls in the appointment of panel members. The recruitment files do not contain evidence of identity, and it is not clear when the panel members were appointed, when they observed a panel, and when they had their induction. In addition, panel members do not receive written performance objectives prior to their appointment. As a consequence, panel members' competence to fulfil the role prior to their appointment cannot be fully demonstrated and the process lacks accountability.

The agency decision-maker makes a considered decision in good time, but the guidance regarding the recording of the decision-making process has not been followed. This is important so that foster carers know that the system is fair and thorough.

The agency has not complied fully with the requirements of the legislation when placing more than three children who are not siblings in a foster home. Although there is a procedure that is followed to gain an exemption from the relevant local authority, this was not carried out on one occasion. In addition, foster carers' terms of approval have not been amended following the granting of an exemption or when a sibling group of more than three children has been placed. Therefore, there is no written evidence that the capacity of the foster carers to provide good care to a larger number of children has been fully considered. There are occasions when siblings share bedrooms. Although this is risk assessed, the decision-making process

is not properly recorded to demonstrate that written permission from the local authority has been sought and gained. It is important that children know how such decisions are reached if they access their records in the future.

Professional relationships are very good, and this results in effective partnership working. Currently, half of the children placed come from a particular local authority and there are regular meetings between the commissioners and the managers to ensure that the agency is aware of its needs. Commissioners are satisfied with the quality of the placements and communication is good. The agency is described as flexible, straightforward and open.

There are also good working relationships with local authority social workers. One child's social worker said: 'The agency has been a pleasure to work with. I have a good relationship with the supervising social worker. I have never felt so supported.' Supervising social workers communicate well, they attend reviews and meetings and work with the child's social worker to support the care plan. However, the manager is not afraid to challenge, raise concerns and advocate in the best interests of children if there are deficits in practice.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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

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Inspector

Ros Chapman: social care inspector



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