

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 23 fostering households, and 46 children were being cared for by its foster carers.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 December 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor and they are not making progress.

Date of last inspection: 4 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Although some children are making progress, there are serious and widespread failures, which have resulted in children not being protected from harm. In addition, it is unclear how children's progress is being evaluated and built on by the fostering agency.

The registered person does not yet have enough oversight regarding what children's lived experiences are. Some potentially risky situations do not prompt professional enquiry and curiosity. Contextual information is sometimes absent from foster carer's recordings, which risks overlooking vulnerabilities and risks. Foster carers are not always given clear guidance as to what steps they need to take to keep children safe.

There is inconsistency in how well children's health needs are recognised and responded to. Children's health appointments are recorded, and needs arising for children with disabilities are detailed on children's files. However, foster carer supervisions do not evidence that children's health concerns are being reviewed or proactively addressed. For example, it was unclear if one child's bed wetting was improving or getting worse. There was no exploration of the possible triggers for this condition. Similarly, where one child self-harmed, there was not enough direction given to foster carers to better support them to keep the child safe. Not all foster carers were trained to meet the disability needs of the children in their care.

Overall, children are supported by the foster carers to attend school and children are making progress academically. Foster carers encourage children to attend extra-curricular activities, such as sporting clubs. Children's educational attainment is monitored by the agency.

There have been some good examples of children building long-term relationships with their foster carers. For example, one child is being supported to live with their long-term foster carers on a shared-lives arrangement. Another fostering family have maintained a relationship with one child, despite this child's placement having previously broken down. However, there was also an example of foster carers ending a sibling placement abruptly. This was traumatic for the children involved and had long-lasting consequences.

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

Since the last inspection, there have been six standard-of-care investigations. One of these investigations happened because a child had suffered significant harm on multiple occasions. Although learning points were identified at the point of this child having suffered significant harm, Ofsted did not see sufficient evidence to suggest that agency practice was keeping children safe.

Social work staff are not consistently and appropriately recording when children are involved in serious incidents. For example, although foster carers were alerting the fostering agency that one child was at risk of child sexual exploitation, these incidents were not recorded or responded to effectively. The fostering agency did not notify Ofsted that this child was at risk of child sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the foster carers did not have up-to-date training in responding to child sexual exploitation.

Social work staff do not yet have a good understanding of child protection or contextual safeguarding. Therefore, they are not yet able to identify the signs that a child may be at risk of suffering from significant harm. The registered person has not yet ensured that social work staff are professionally curious when supervising foster carer practice. Additionally, there is no evidence to suggest that social work staff are professionally challenging foster carer practice during supervision. This is necessary to protect children and to improve foster carer practice.

Systems are not yet in place to recognise, record and respond to risks for children. Risk assessments and care planning documents are not live documents, and they lack detail. For example, when sanctuary-seeking children were placed with carers earlier this year, their specific risks and vulnerabilities were unknown. This was because they were very new to services. However, despite having built relationships with their carers over several months, their risk assessments have not been updated to reflect this. There is a pattern of children's risk assessments not being up to date.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The registered person commissioned their own learning review in October 2021 following a child having suffered from significant harm. Although this was good practice, the fostering agency shortfalls have not yet been addressed. This is necessary to protect children and help them to make progress. For instance, although it was identified that there needed to be more scrutiny around fostering assessments, an assessment was reviewed at this inspection that identified that risks had not been adequately explored. This puts children at risk of harm.

Although social work staff are receiving regular supervision, gaps remain in supervising social workers' knowledge and expertise. Supervisions are not yet reflective, and so they do not allow adequate time for case discussion. It was clear in one supervision record that the team manager had been made aware that a child was at risk of exploitation. However, no action was taken to report this incident and the supervising social worker was not directed to training in contextual safeguarding. This is poor management oversight. Although the manager knew that this child had already had nine local authority social workers, there was no advocacy from the fostering agency on behalf of the child to help resolve this situation and bring about increased stability.

When reviewing foster carer supervision records these do not evidence whether children are making progress or not. Additionally, it is unclear what strategies foster carers are being given to help children stay safe. Although children say that they see

supervising social workers, this is not well evidenced, and it is unclear whether children are being seen alone or being asked about their care. Despite these shortfalls, foster carers are receiving regular supervision, and foster carers, children and stakeholders are, overall, positive about the service that they receive from the fostering agency.

Overall, Ofsted is not confident that the registered person has enough management oversight to ensure that children are well cared for and protected from harm. Although social work staff are hard working and motivated, they are not being adequately supported to recognise and respond to children who may be at risk of harm. Due to Ofsted not having been notified of several safeguarding concerns, this has hindered the regulator's ability to scrutinise the fostering agency's safeguarding practice.

Although foster carer recruitment has been more of a challenge since the COVID-19 pandemic, foster carer numbers have remained steady. There is a support group available to foster carers and, although some do attend this, the numbers are lower than they were prior to the pandemic. The fostering agency has recognised that some foster carers would like more face-to-face training, and this is something that the registered person is working towards.

The recommendations were not reviewed at this inspection and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))	15 January 2023
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. The written policy must include a statement of measures to be taken to safeguard any child before making parent and child arrangements with that foster parent. The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for— liaison and co-operation with any local authority which is, or may be, making child protection enquiries in relation to any child placed by the fostering service provider; the prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed by the fostering service provider; notification of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries involving a child placed by the fostering service provider, to the Chief Inspector; written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response;	5 February 2023

consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect; and arrangements to be made for persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, foster parents and children placed by the fostering service, to have the address (including email address), and telephone number of— the area authority; and the Chief Inspector, for the purposes of referring any concern about child welfare or safety to them. Sub-paragraphs (a) and (c) of paragraph (3) do not apply to a local authority fostering service. In this regulation "child protection enquiries" means any enquiries carried out by a local authority in the exercise of any of its functions conferred by or under the 1989 Act relating to the protection of children. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(i)(ii) (4) (5))	
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3). 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 (1) (2) (3))	5 February 2023
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—	5 February 2023

the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it; and the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a)(b))	
The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent ("X"), and any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. The fostering service provider— must obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and family, and any other information they consider relevant. (Regulation 26 (1)(2)(a))	5 February 2023
If any of the events listed 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. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))	5 February 2023

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- 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)

- 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)

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: Bovell Palmer

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Inspectors

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

Laura Walker, Social Care Inspector

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