

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 22 fostering households, and 42 children were being cared for by foster carers.

There is an experienced manager who is registered with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 October 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 5 December 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection:

The agency was suspended following the last full inspection. A compliance notice was issued in relation to Regulation 12. Monitoring visits were carried out on 17 January 2023 and 7 March 2023. Ofsted was satisfied that the steps in the

compliance notice had been met following the visit on 7 March 2023, and the suspension notice was lifted.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

This is the first full inspection since the agency reopened on 8 March 2023. The care provided is not yet consistently good for all children. Some children are receiving individualised care and are making progress with their health, education and emotional well-being. Many of the children are settled. However, some areas of their lives are not progressing in a timely way. For example, one child is not able to see an important member of his family. Actions taken by the agency to advocate for the child have not been sufficient to resolve this issue.

One child has experienced poor care for a prolonged period. This was due to a delay in acting on emerging issues impacting the child. As a result, the child's emotional well-being was affected, and an ongoing health issue was not adequately addressed. The agency took action when the child said he wanted to move, and he is now living with a foster carer who is more attuned to his needs.

Foster carers have experienced changes in social workers due to recent recruitment. They do not feel impacted by this. However, foster carers have become less reliant on their social workers. In some cases, foster carers have made decisions independently of the agency, such as installing cameras and door alarms without approval. Some foster carers are not completing the required recordings. Action plans to address this are not clear. As a result, some foster carers have not yet improved their practice. This impacts on children having full information about their lives and the agency having oversight of children's day-to-day experiences.

Children enjoy a range of activities, which means they develop new skills and self-confidence. Foster carers support children to follow their religion and beliefs. There is good support for sanctuary-seeking children, for example helping them to make connections in the community. This enables children to feel accepted and welcomed.

Overall, foster carers demonstrate resilience and a strong commitment to children. They do not give up on children easily, even through the most challenging times. As a result, children remain with their foster carers for prolonged periods. There are some good examples of 'staying put' arrangements. Children stay in touch when they move on, which demonstrates the strong relationships they develop over time.

Prospective foster carers are well supported through the assessment process. The agency provides a sensitive approach to the initial stages of the assessment, and there is relevant training to help prepare applicants for the role. Existing carers co-facilitate the training, which provides a sense of 'realism' that is valued by prospective carers.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The manager has worked hard to improve safeguarding practice since the last full inspection. There are systems in place to maintain oversight of serious incidents involving children. Relevant agencies are informed of these incidents when necessary. Risk management plans and chronologies of significant events are kept up to date. As a result, it is clearer when levels and the nature of risk are changing.

The agency's social workers have received training to increase professional curiosity. This has been effective in some areas of practice. For example, social workers speak to children alone following reports of accidents or injuries. These discussions are well recorded, capturing vital information that can be used to assess any patterns of concern. However, social workers are not always responding to changes in carers' behaviour, which could, if left unchecked, place children at increased risk of harm. When concerns have been raised, the agency has implemented the standards of care procedure appropriately. There has been one occasion where a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) has not been made in a timely way.

Supervising social workers are completing unannounced visits. However, some have not been carried out in agreed timescales. This could lead to a delay in identifying unknown concerns regarding the care of children. During the inspection, the manager acknowledged the importance of ensuring that these visits are undertaken annually as a minimum requirement.

Foster carers are well supported when children have gone missing from home. Supervising social workers provide a coordinated response to help protect children from harm. The manager works closely with external agencies to ensure that plans are in place to reduce incidents. When there are shortfalls in practice, the manager escalates her concerns to make sure they are addressed. There are examples where her work in this area has been effective in keeping children safe.

Children can talk to their foster carers about their worries and concerns, knowing they will be listened to. Children can share incidents of bullying at school or any conflicts that they have with their friends. They receive good support from the agency to resolve these issues.

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

The registered manager has managed a busy period. She has reopened the agency following the suspension notice being lifted. She has recruited new members of staff and has welcomed all foster carers and their children back. The registered manager, with the support of a new team manager, has made sure that the agency has met the requirements from the last inspection.

The registered manager recognises there are areas of practice that still require improvement, some of which were brought into focus by the inspection. She is

committed to addressing outstanding shortfalls and have plans in place to achieve this through further training, development and supervision of social workers. The registered manager is also concentrating on regular audits of foster carer supervision sessions. This will be important in the process of identifying concerns in a timely way.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision. Children's experiences and progress are thoroughly discussed and recorded. However, the effectiveness of supervision relies on the ability of social workers to focus on pertinent issues. As social workers are not always identifying these, there is still potential for important issues to be left without the assessment of a manager.

The responsible individual has recently left, and a new person has been appointed. She has the relevant experience and a commitment to improving practice. However, her role is not established, and therefore the impact of her work is yet to be tested.

There are shortfalls in the effectiveness of the fostering panel. Discussions at panel meetings are not managed well and do not result in well-formulated advice and recommendations. In one case, the panel highlighted some concerns but did not provide clear advice or recommendations about how the agency could monitor, explore or reduce those concerns. The performance of the panel chair has been appraised. However, areas for development were not discussed. During the inspection, the registered manager developed plans to address the identified shortfalls.

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 registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that social workers have the skills and knowledge to identify emerging issues or concerns relating to the care of children and address them with carers in a timely way to promote consistency of care for children. Where a DBS referral regarding a carer is required, this needs to be made without delay.	14 January 2024
The functions of the fostering panel in respect of cases referred to it by the fostering service provider are— to consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent, where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given, to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate— on the first review carried out in accordance with regulation 28(2), and	14 January 2024

on the occasion of any other review, if requested to do so by the fostering service provider in accordance with regulation 28(5), and to consider any case referred to it under regulation 27(9) or 28(10). The fostering panel must also— advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness, oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. (Regulation 25 (1)(a)(b)(c)(i)(ii)(d) (4)(a)(b)(c)) This specifically relates to ensuring that the panel provides clear advice and recommendations regarding the management, supervision and support of foster carers following reviews and applications to foster. This is to ensure that all carers receive the appropriate oversight to care for children safely.	
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. The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that— no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13 (1) (2)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that foster carers do not implement methods of surveillance of children that have not been approved by the agency and the child's social worker.	14 January 2024

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the carer. (Fostering Services: national minimum standards, page 42, paragraph 21.7)
- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, to ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and to offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (Fostering Services: national minimum standards, page 43, paragraph 21.8)

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

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Inspector

Laura Walker, Social Care Inspector

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