

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy Limited

Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 2SJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency offers short- and long-term, emergency and short break placements. There are currently 17 children living in 18 fostering households.

There has been no registered manager since May 2024. The manager has applied to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 August 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 25 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress because they are cared for by compassionate and resilient foster carers and because of the excellent support that the agency provides.

Foster carers build secure and positive relationships with children that are based on trust, kindness and acceptance. As a result, children are thriving and achieving well in all areas of their life. Children describe their foster carers as 'amazing', 'helpful', 'supportive', 'funny' and 'kind'.

There is a strong focus on ensuring that children experience placement stability. Managers and agency staff proactively advocate for children and demonstrate highly effective partnership working with other professionals responsible for children's care planning. A significant proportion of children remain with their foster families into adulthood.

Foster carers are familiar with children's methods of communication. When children need additional support to communicate, including when their first language is not English, this is sought for them. As a result, children are empowered to have a say in the way that they are cared for, and their views are listened to and acted on.

Foster carers support children well to celebrate their cultural identity, for example by facilitating visits to religious venues and providing specialist foods. Children's birth families appreciate foster carers' commitment to responding to their wishes and maintaining children's cultural identities.

Foster carers understand the importance of children spending time with their birth families. This is made possible due to the diligent approach and effective support from the agency. Consequently, children benefit from spending time with people who are important to them.

Foster carers are adept at helping children to understand their own emotional, physical and mental health needs. Priority is given to making sure that children attend all routine and specialist health appointments. This helps to ensure that children live happy and healthy lives.

Children have access to a wide range of learning opportunities because their foster carers and the agency staff have firm beliefs that all children can achieve well in life. Some children have travelled abroad with their foster families. Some children have exceeded expectations in education and successfully gained apprenticeships or secured places at college or university. Children are unquestionably proud of their achievements.

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

The excellent safeguarding culture is central to children's care planning and lived experiences. The positive relationships between children and their foster carers are based on openness, trust and respect. This contributes to children's safety and their sense of security.

Foster carers support children to have age-appropriate freedom and choice. They are skilled at helping children to understand risks, for example in relation to unhealthy relationships. For one child, this encouraged them to discuss their concerns and make informed decisions about distancing themselves from unsafe people.

Excellent relationship-based interventions have a positive impact on children's experiences. Experienced foster carers are alert to any signs or symptoms that indicate a child may be at risk of harm. Children say that they would speak to their foster carers if they were worried or concerned. Consequently, risk-taking behaviour and incidents are rare.

Children understand the role of the supervising social workers and form positive relationships with them. One child said, '[A supervising social worker] spends time with me at home and attends all my meetings.' Another said, 'They are really kind and know me really well; I can talk about anything.'

Agency staff have a sound understanding of children's strengths and vulnerabilities. They demonstrate professional curiosity during regular discussions with foster carers. This ensures that there is a shared understanding of children's current risks. Staff and managers have regular meetings which provide opportunities for important discussions about safeguarding children and placement stability. As a result, early indications of placement breakdown and foster carer fatigue are identified and addressed without delay.

When children make complaints or allegations about agency staff or foster carers, managers respond robustly to ensure the safety of children. The views of children and external safeguarding agencies are considered, and swift and decisive action is taken.

On occasions when foster carers do not meet the high standard of care expected, managers are meticulous in their approach to ensure that there is no negative impact on children. Concerns are managed efficiently and thoroughly. Foster carers are challenged appropriately, and records reflect learning and outcomes for the whole agency.

The therapeutic model of care is evident in all aspects of the agency's work. Foster carers benefit from the good quality training, guidance and collaboration the agency provides. As a result, foster carers feel empowered, knowledgeable and supported to deliver safe, informed, high-quality care to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

An inspiring strength of this agency is that the compassionate, child-focused leadership team strives for equality of opportunity for all children. The agency's overall aim is for children to succeed and achieve all their ambitions in life. This vision is shared throughout the agency.

Leaders are excellent role models for the passionate and conscientious supervising social workers and clinical lead. They are proactive and determined, and committed to ensuring that children continue to benefit from receiving care of the highest quality.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for development. Effective monitoring of the service identified minor shortfalls that were acted on before the inspection, for example in relation to the quality and frequency of staff training. A clear action plan is in place to address this, but improvements are not yet embedded.

All staff receive regular supervision and a significant level of informal support from leaders. Staff describe managers as 'approachable', 'motivated' and 'knowledgeable'.

The fostering panel consists of appropriately qualified and experienced members who are equipped to make recommendations in the best interests of children. The panel chair is diligent, knowledgeable and promotes a collaborative approach. For example, the panel is held in the evening so there is opportunity for all adults to attend, including those who have commitments during the day.

The diversity of the panel has improved through creative recruitment supported by the excellent reputation of the agency. The recent addition of a care-experienced young person is intended to further improve the knowledge and insight of panel members. Records of panel are detailed and clearly state reasons for recommendations. However, at times there are grammatical and factual accuracy errors.

The responsible individual in his role as agency decision-maker provides clarity and scrutiny to decision-making. There is effective and informed challenge in order to ensure that recommendations promote the welfare of children.

Leaders complete their own review of the quality of care provided to children. Their desire to continually strive to improve their own practice is commendable.

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

Recommendations

- There is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1)
- 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. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7). Specifically, this relates to ensuring that there are no grammatical errors and that factual information is correct.

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: SC383749

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Inspectors

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector
Emma Haskell, Social Care Inspector

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