

New Life Fostering Agency

90 New Town Row, Aston, Birmingham B6 4HZ

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This small fostering agency is privately owned, and was registered in May 2012. It currently supports 20 children in 11 foster care households. It provides planned and emergency short-term and long-term placements. This is the sole branch of this agency. The director operates, from the same premises, a supervised-contact business for children who are separated from their parents.

Inspection date: 23 January 2018

Date of previous inspection: 5 October 2017

This monitoring visit

Ofsted judged this fostering agency to be inadequate at a full inspection on 27 June 2017. Ofsted issued two rounds of compliance notices to address serious concerns over safeguarding practice and the poor governance of the agency.

Ofsted completed a second monitoring visit on 23 January 2018, and found significant improvements in the agency's governance arrangements, and in the outcomes for children. All three compliance notices are now met.

Improved arrangements demonstrate that the registered provider is now operating the fostering agency with improved care, competence and skill.

A new manager took up post on 20 November 2017. She is well qualified and experienced, and plans to register with Ofsted. A new responsible individual took up post on 6 October 2017. This person has the skills, experience and qualifications to supervise the management of the fostering agency.

The registered person is now ensuring that all records generated by the agency are both credible and reliable. Clear accountability for decision-making is now in place. This extends to the registered manager, the supervising social workers, the panel chair, the agency decision-maker and the responsible individual. For example, when the manager is absent, the responsible individual steps into the manager's role. The

responsible individual has taken the role of agency decision-maker, and has implemented improvements in the foster carer approval process.

The registered provider has taken steps to ensure that the welfare of children is now safeguarded and promoted at all times. A thorough review of all placement endings has helped to identify actions for future improvement.

A new managerial review system has helped to ensure that case file audits for foster carers and children are more effective in tracking the quality of their relationships, and how this influences children's outcomes.

The responsible individual has reviewed all serious incidents and safeguarding concerns, and has identified gaps in the training, skills and knowledge of foster carers and staff. The responsible individual is taking improvement action, where necessary. These arrangements better protect children, and ensure that foster care placements are safe.

The agency has taken action to meet the majority of the 11 previous requirements. An accurate and up-to-date statement of purpose now describes the range of placements that foster carers can offer. This document is shared with Ofsted, and is on the organisation's website so that foster carers, the regulator, placement authorities and parents can be clear about what to expect. Improved staff recruitment procedures make sure that only people who are fit to work with children do so.

Timely, informative notifications to Ofsted and placing authorities about serious events demonstrate that the registered provider has now taken effective action to learn from incidents and to improve children's experiences. For example, a recent review identified how the supervising social worker's proactive partnership working with a school, the placing authority and the foster carers of one child, resulted in them picking up that this child was experiencing bullying at school.

Improved systems for matching children with their foster carers mean that it is now clear from the outset whether a foster carer has the required skills, knowledge and competence to meet a child's needs.

Better systems for following up on gaps in foster carers' training mean that the agency has a better picture of foster carers' competency against the needs of children already placed with them. All foster carers have now achieved the required training, support and development standards in foster care within one year of being approved to accept placements.

An effective system for monitoring, reviewing and reporting to Ofsted, based on consultation with children and foster carers, identifies the strengths and weaknesses in the agency and is likely to lead to improvement that will benefit children.

The registered provider has transformed its governance. A new, inclusive

'improvement board' is composed of agency staff at all levels and foster carers. This makes sure that a continual cycle of planning and review focuses on the things that matter the most to the lives of children in foster care.

Three requirements in relation to the quality of foster carer assessments, panel recommendation processes and approvals remain. The systems for supporting all three areas are beginning to improve. However, these processes have not yet been sufficiently tested or embedded under the new management arrangements. The responsible individual has identified further areas for development. For example, a panel development day is planned and a new assessor is to be employed.

The extent of the progress made at the agency reflects the significant work, time and energy that have been contributed by all concerned. A comprehensive and effective plan has delivered improvement. The agency is well set to continue a positive trajectory.

Ofsted will carry out a full inspection within 6 to twelve months of the previous inspection, to evaluate the impact that these improved arrangements, policies and procedures have had on children.

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 panel must make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. (Regulation 24(2)) This relates to clarity of recommendations and panel meeting minutes.	01/05/2018
Where a person ('X') applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decides to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. (Regulation 26(1))	01/05/2018
A fostering service provider must, in deciding whether to approve X as a foster parent and as to the terms of any approval, take into account the recommendation of the fostering panel. If a fostering service provider decides to approve X as a foster parent, they must give X notice in writing, specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the 'foster care agreement'). (Regulation 27(3)(5)(a)(b))	01/05/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that, unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including, where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. This information could be made available electronically to placing authorities to share with children on their emergency journeys. (National minimum standard (NMS) 11.3)
- Ensure that, following a review of the carer's approval under regulation 28, the fostering service provides the foster carer with a written statement setting out whether they consider the foster carer's household, including any children placed there, to have additional support needs as a result of the change, and, if so, what these support needs are and how they will be met; and the foster carer provides their written agreement to the change. Foster

carers must not be pressured to accept changes to their terms of approval.
(‘Assessment and approval of foster carers: amendments to the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations’, volume 4: fostering services, page 15)

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC447166

Registered provider: New Life Fostering Agency Limited

Registered provider address: 90 New Town Row, Aston, Birmingham B6 4HG

Responsible individual: Gary Pickles

Inspector

Christy Wannop: social care inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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