

New Life Fostering Agency

New Life Fostering Agency Limited

Charter House, 848 Tyburn Road, Birmingham B24 9NT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private company operates this fostering agency. The agency was registered with Ofsted in 2012.

The fostering service provides short-term, long-term, emergency and parent and child foster homes. It also provides foster families who support brothers and sisters to remain together.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 39 approved fostering households and 65 children placed with its foster carers.

There is no registered manager. A new manager started in post in February 2023. Ofsted received the manager's application to register during the inspection.

Inspection dates: 31 July to 4 August 2023

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: 13 June 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Managers' oversight of the agency and of the arrangements to safeguard children has significantly deteriorated since the last inspection. This compromises the quality of care that the agency provides. As a result of this inspection, Ofsted has issued three compliance notices under regulations 8, 11 and 12.

Not all of the children are cared for by foster carers who have received the relevant support, training and information to care for children safely and effectively. For example, one fostering household did not have a carer with first-aid training despite primarily being short-break and respite carers and caring for a number of children with complex needs.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that there are reliable and effective monitoring systems. Consequently, it is not clear how children's progress and outcomes are measured. The current system is not accurate and does not provide any context for understanding how the children are making progress.

Despite the shortfalls, foster carers work hard to ensure that children receive a positive experience. Most children enjoy stability in their foster homes. The current foster carers express genuine affection for the children in their care. The children are settled and are treated like family. This helps children feel that they belong. Older children may continue to live with foster carers when they reach 18 years old and into adulthood if this is appropriate.

Children attend school regularly and are supported with their education. Some children receive specialist support. This helps those that need it to overcome any barriers to their learning and assists them to make progress. A number of children made good progress with their education and are now accessing further education.

Staff and foster carers are proactive in supporting children to keep in touch with people who are important to them. This child-centred approach enables children to make positive memories with their families.

Children are engaging in leisure interests that they enjoy. Foster families have been brought together through the activities that have been facilitated by the agency, such as a recent trip to a theme park. The manager is developing systems to ensure that children's wishes and feelings inform service developments.

Prospective foster carers are welcomed when they initially contact the agency. Those who go on to apply feel well prepared by the application process and the training that is made available to them.

Information for children is given to help them understand how they will be cared for. Children are presented with information in their first language when needed, which

includes details about how to make a complaint.

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

Matching processes are inconsistent and put children at risk. Matching decisions are not always made before children move to live with foster carers. In addition, matching decisions are made without the agency seeking the current and relevant information that staff need about children or foster carers. For example, staff arranged the placement of children with foster carers without considering significant health concerns with other children in the fostering household. This poor practice means that it is not clear that staff are making safe, child-centred and informed decisions when arranging placements for children.

Staff have failed to identify or act in response to an allegation made by a child against their foster carer. This failure to identify or respond to a safeguarding concern demonstrates a lack of attention to the protection of children.

Managers do not share information with Ofsted in a timely way about child protection investigations, or when children have made allegations about their foster carers. Managers did not let Ofsted know about an allegation made by a child about their foster carer until 10 days after being made aware of it.

Risk assessment practice is inadequate. Assessments of risk and safer care plans are not always comprehensive or individualised and lack detail about known risks and vulnerabilities, for example regarding presenting sexualised behaviours and supervision of children. They do not provide foster carers with the strategies and guidance they need to safely manage risk and keep the children in their care safe.

Managers have failed to identify that information is being copied between children's risk assessments. For example, inspectors found that risk reduction strategies for babies were the same as the strategies set out for teenagers reaching 18 years of age. Children's risk assessments are therefore not individualised to them. Because of this poor practice, significant information about a child's health has been omitted from their risk assessment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have failed to maintain effective management oversight of the agency's operation. There has been some instability in the agency. A new manager has been recruited in recent months. A number of supervising social workers have left the agency, and new appointments have been made to fill the vacancies.

Leadership and management of the agency are weak. Managers were not aware of the majority of safeguarding concerns identified during this inspection until these were raised by the inspector. This demonstrates poor oversight of the service.

Management oversight and monitoring of the service are inadequate. Monitoring

systems used by the responsible individual and the manager have failed to identify the wide-ranging shortfalls in the quality of care provided within the service. These ineffective monitoring systems do not support the protection of children or improve the quality of care that children receive.

Foster carers and the agency do not have all the required information about the children in their care. This includes placement plans, care plans, personal education plans, looked after health assessments and looked after child review documents. This means that foster carers do not have the most up-to-date information when providing care for the children.

Reporting and recording are poor. Managers fail to review records. The inspectors found several examples of inaccurate recording and unchallenged records. Poor practice is not highlighted and challenged. This means staff are not supported to understand how to improve their practice when caring for children.

Managers have failed to respond effectively to staff practice concerns. For example, when concerns relating to one member of staff were raised, the agency's response was insufficient, with no follow up. Additionally, managers are unable to show when concerns are raised or addressed, informing inspectors that this is done verbally and informally with no written notes.

The fostering panel is effective. The panel ensures that there is a rigorous process for approving and reviewing foster carers' suitability. Issues identified during assessment are explored, and helpful recommendations are made to support foster carers.

Annual reviews are completed and provide a detailed overview of the last 12 months the carers have experienced. The annual reviews include feedback from children, professionals and birth children. The reviews give a clear rationale for continued approval and make clear recommendations. While it is noted that the above scrutiny is a strength of the agency, managers do not ensure that recommendations from annual reviews and panel that are made are always met within the required timescales.

Foster carers feel very well supported by the agency. Almost all carers say that communication is excellent, and they can always speak to somebody when they need to. Foster carers receive regular supervision from qualified social workers. This support helps foster carers to meet the demands of their role.

Feedback from supervising social workers about the support offered to them by the management team is positive. Staff say they receive regular reflective supervision on their cases, which they find beneficial. However, there is no evidence in the records of children or their foster carers that supervision takes place.

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 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 (1)(a)) This specifically relates to leaders and managers ensuring that risk management is robust. Presenting risks and concerns of children should be taken into consideration when they are matched to live with others, and foster carers should be informed of strategies to reduce risk.	24 September 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 procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for— 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, 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. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b) (3)(c)(d)(e))	24 September 2023

This specifically relates to leaders and managers understanding the role of the agency when responding to allegations and concerns.	
*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 leaders and managers having oversight of the agency and effective monitoring systems in place.	24 September 2023
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 (3)) This specifically relates to ensuring that foster carers are provided with children's care plans.	24 September 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. (Regulation 36 (1)) Leaders and managers must ensure that all foster carers have the most up-to-date plans and assessments to enable them to support children safely.	24 September 2023

* These requirements are subject to a compliance notice.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive sufficient training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases, specifically ensuring that each foster household has a person who is first-aid trained. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 6.7)
- The registered person should have a system in place to monitor record-keeping and take action when required. This specifically relates to ensuring that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that areas of concern, or a need for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews should be addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.9)

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: SC447166

Registered provider: New Life Fostering Agency Limited

Registered provider address: Charter House, 848 Tyburn Road, Birmingham B24 9NT

Responsible individual: Gary Pickles

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Kev Brammer, Social Care Inspector
Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

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