

Apple Fostering Services

Apple Fostering Ltd

6th Floor First Central 200, 2 Lakeside Drive, Park Royal, Harlesden, London NW10 7FQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency, which registered with Ofsted in 2012. The manager registered with Ofsted in 2018.

The agency provides short- and long-term care placements, bridging placements, respite care, emergency care, and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 24 approved foster families providing care to 34 children.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 20 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are happy and they enjoy living with their foster carers. They feel secure due to close and trusting relationships with their foster carers. One child said that their foster carer is 'kind and nice'.

Children thrive because they have good care and support from dedicated foster carers. Children enjoy stable placements, which help their well-being, development and achievements.

Children receive nurturing care from the foster carers they live with. Foster carers are positive about the relationships that children have with them. They said that some of the children have developed a strong sense of belonging and they call them 'mum' or 'dad'.

Children get effective support to help them prepare for the challenges and opportunities of adult life. Foster carers teach them how to look after themselves. This includes teaching children how to clean, wash their clothes and cook. Some children stay with their foster carers in staying put arrangements after they turn 18 years old. This provides them with a stable home, consistent care and ongoing support networks. A young person said that everything about living with the foster carer is good. This young person enjoys going on holiday abroad with their foster carer and are successfully engaged in employment.

Children make good progress in all aspects of their lives. This includes education, and all children attend school or college. Foster carers are ambitious for children to do well. They are proud that children they support do well at school and progress into employment, education or training opportunities.

Children take part in activities that they enjoy. One child said that they like swimming, playing football, eating out and going to the park. They also enjoy riding the scooter they received as a gift on their birthday. Children said that they particularly enjoy seaside trips, which are arranged by managers. Managers plan activities with foster carers to ensure that these are suitable for all children.

Children spend time with their families or friends. Managers ensure that siblings live together to maintain family connections. This promotes family relationships and gives children a strong sense of identity.

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

Children are happy and they feel safe living with their foster carers. Very few children go missing from home. On the rare occasions this occurs, foster carers and staff manage this in a supportive and planned way. Appropriate actions are taken to safeguard children.

Children get help with their emotional well-being when they feel upset. Foster carers talk to children to help them understand their emotions. Children also get intensive specialist support from health professionals if they need it.

Children have access to a mentoring service. This service can help children who may be at risk of criminal exploitation to stay safe. The manager is proud that some young people have benefited from this support and risks relating to exploitation have reduced.

There are very few serious incidents that may result in a child coming to harm. Managers share any allegations of harm to children with appropriate agencies. Such incidents are managed effectively, and managers are responsive to identify any learning to help keep children safe.

Staff carry out planned, unannounced visits to check that children are safe and happy. Visits are conducted at a frequency that is consistent with both the needs of children and carers. Records show, and children said, that staff speak sensitively with them when they visit. This gives children an opportunity to talk about what is going well for them or to raise concerns they may have.

Staff employment checks are thorough so that only suitable staff work for the agency. The rigorous checks of foster carers ensure that they are safe to care for children. Managers review the suitability of staff and foster carers in a planned way.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed by an experienced, skilled and qualified manager. There is effective communication with external professional agencies. This ensures that staff and foster carers have the information they need to understand children's needs.

Managers support foster carers to keep regular records about children. One child's records had a date of birth error, and there was no risk assessment for when children are sharing a bedroom. The manager has identified that they need to check the quality of the records in a planned way.

The agency's quality reviews provide detailed information about what is happening within the agency. However, this lacks evidence of consultation with children, foster carers and staff.

Staff and foster carers receive good, relevant training and supervision. Foster carers who are new to fostering have relevant training to develop their skills. However, some staff said that the induction training is not detailed enough. They said that this does not provide sufficient guidance for staff who are new to working in a fostering service.

Foster carers report feeling well supported and confident in their roles. Some of them have been with the agency for many years. One foster carer said, 'It is a more

family oriented agency, and everyone is approachable.' Foster carers' concerns about allowances and other contractual matters are having no impact on the care provided to children. These issues are being addressed by leaders and managers.

Foster carers value the help they get when they need time away from their caring role. The agency has a consistent team of support workers who provide this. Children are comfortable with the support workers because they know them well.

The agency's panel members are diverse. They recently employed a panel member who has experience of living with a foster carer. This adds a different perspective to the understanding of children's needs. Panel members have access to training that they find of benefit to fulfil their role competently. The panel chair is very experienced and provides an effective quality assurance function in relation to the quality of reports to panel. The manager is proud that they complete the reviews of foster carers' suitability to care for the children in a timely way.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that reports of quality reviews include feedback from children, foster carers, placing authorities and staff. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to assure themselves that these contain accurate information about children, foster carers and staff. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a record of an assessment when it has been agreed that children can share a bedroom. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 10.6)
- The registered person should ensure that staff have a robust induction programme. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1)

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: SC451751

Registered provider: Apple Fostering Ltd

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Inspectors

Thobekile Bandama, Social Care Inspector

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