

Independent fostering agency – Monitoring visit

Name	Apple Fostering Services
Inspection date	14/02/2017
Unique reference number	SC451751
Type of inspection	Monitoring
Inspector	Lee Kirwin

This monitoring visit

This is a monitoring visit following a judgement of inadequate given at a full inspection undertaken on 24 October 2016. The agency has made significant improvements, but not all of the requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection are met.

The manager has undertaken a full audit of the recruitment checks for panel members and all checks to ensure that safe recruitment procedures for all agency staff are now in place. Some panel members have left the agency. There is currently insufficient personnel to form an effective panel. The agency is urgently seeking to recruit new panel members. Because the agency does not have a panel, it has been unable to present one foster carer to panel for her first annual review. It has undertaken not to place any young people with this carer until an effective panel is in place. There are currently no prospective foster carers to approve.

The agency has introduced a new database for recording information. It is collating information in respect of the young people's education attendance, attainment and progress. An outcomes tracker provides a facility for the manager to keep a close eye on the progress that the young people are making. This has helped the agency to identify patterns to better understand behaviour in respect of one young person who is sometimes missing from care.

The agency has employed a dedicated member of staff to improve its quality assurance capabilities. This has had a positive impact. The recording systems are now set up in a way that significantly enhances the manager's ability to monitor the quality of care provided to young people. The provider has not yet been able to collect all relevant data for each young person. This means that it is not yet providing an overview of education outcomes for all young people.

The agency has recruited a supervising social worker. She is experienced in the role and is providing effective monthly supervision visits to foster carers. Written records of supervisions are maintained and accessible. She reports feeling well supported by the interim manager and receives regular supervision.

The interim manager is suitably experienced in the role. She has recently updated the agency's statement of purpose, to better reflect the range of placements that the agency can support. Her role is now clearly defined and she receives regular practice supervision from an external consultant, who is a qualified social worker.

The agency has also recruited an independent person to fulfil the role of agency decision-maker. There is now a clear staffing structure to ensure that the independence of the panel is not compromised. The agency has also identified an independent social worker to undertake foster carer annual reviews. This provides a further level of independent scrutiny in order to assess and monitor the quality of care provided to young people.

The full impact of the new staffing arrangements has not yet been tested in practice. This is because there have been no panel activity or foster care reviews

carried out since the last inspection.

The agency has improved its practice in relation to undertaking individual risk assessments for young people. These are now completed by the agency social worker, in consultation with the foster carer. The agency has a number of formats for risk and vulnerability assessments. It uses a format designed for generic safer caring assessments. This does not lend itself well to identifying risk factors and clear interventions to manage risks. Risks assessments in relation to young people being missing from care do not provide sufficient detail about previous missing behaviour. In addition, they do not provide clear guidance on how foster carers should intervene to keep each young person safe. In practice, young people seldom go missing, and those that do tend to reduce the frequency of missing episodes. Foster carers are proactive in seeking their safe return and work effectively in partnership to safeguard children and young people.

The agency has a learning and development plan for each foster carer. This clearly identifies their training needs. There is a programme of training in place to meet these needs. However, not all foster carers have completed training on child sexual exploitation, radicalisation or first aid. Thus, requirements made at the previous inspection in relation to foster carer training are not met.

The manager has taken steps to make sure that the agency has a variety of methods to ascertain the views and understand the experiences of young people. She responds promptly to any concerns that they may have, but is not yet using this information to inform service development. The agency has clear plans in place to seek the views of foster carers and placing authorities. However, these are not yet in place and therefore cannot be assessed. Similarly, the manager has clarified expectations in terms of conducting unannounced visits to foster carers. Although planned, they have not yet taken place.

Overall, in the time available since the last full inspection, the agency has made significant and positive progress. Not all planned improvements are in place and some improvements have not been in place long enough to assess their impact. No young people have been admitted to or discharged from foster placements. All placements are currently stable. Young people are making positive progress and they are safe.

The improvements in recording practice, staffing arrangements and management oversight mean that the agency is now better placed to identify any concerns and respond to them effectively.

Information about this independent fostering agency

Apple Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency based in Wembley, Middlesex. It carries out the recruitment, assessment, training and approval of foster carers and provides ongoing support to foster carers. The agency provides placement opportunities for children looked after by local authorities. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 10 young people placed in seven fostering households, cared for by eight foster carers.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that must be taken so that the registered person(s) meet(s) 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
11: Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare The registered person, in respect of an independent fostering agency, must ensure that— (a) the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. In order to meet this regulation, the agency must ensure that individual risk assessments identify the risk factors in relation to young people and identify interventions to reduce risks. (Regulation 11(a))	10/05/2017
35: Review of quality of care The registered person must maintain an effective monitoring system, which focuses on improving the quality of foster care provided by the agency. This should incorporate the views of foster carers, young people and their placing authorities. (Regulation 35(1)(b) and 35(3))	10/05/2017
16: Education, employment and leisure activities The registered person must implement an effective system for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance for children placed in foster care. (Regulation 16(2)(a))	10/05/2017

28: Reviews and terminations of approval (2) A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter, whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (5) The fostering service provider must, on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration. (Regulation 28(2)(5))	10/05/2017
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Implement a proactive approach to risk assessment to better support foster carers in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young people where they are known to exhibit potentially unsafe behaviours. (National minimum standards 4.2 and 4.5)
- Ensure that foster carers are aware of the runaway and missing from home and care protocols and procedures applicable to the area where they live, and to the young person placed. In particular, the agency must assess the risks and vulnerabilities for each young person, in relation to being missing from care and identify clear steps to reduce these risks. (National minimum standard 5.7)
- The views of the child, the child's family, social worker and independent reviewing officer are sought regularly on the child's care (unless in individual cases this is not appropriate). The supervising social worker should see them alone when undertaking visits. The agency must have mechanisms in place for ascertaining the views of young people to inform service development. (National minimum standard 1.4)
- Ensure that all foster carers have clear personal development plans in place to evidence ongoing training and development appropriate to their development needs and to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the young people they are caring for or expected to care for. In particular, foster carers should undertake training on child sexual exploitation, risks relating to radicalisation and first aid. (National minimum standards 20.5 and 20.8)
- Ensure that annual unannounced visits are undertaken to ensure that the physical environment is suitably maintained and provides a safe, homely, nurturing environment for young people. (National minimum standards 10.2 and

10.5)

- Maintain a central list and implement written policies in relation to the recruitment of panel members. Panel members should be interviewed for the role and all employments checks completed. In developing an effective panel, the agency should have regard for the whole of national minimum standard 19 and particular regard for national minimum standards 14.1 and 19.1.
- Provide a written record to demonstrate the reasons for decisions taken by the agency decision-maker. (National minimum standard 14.9)

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.

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