

Ikon Fostering Limited

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Pool Street, Walsall WS1 2EN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ikon Fostering is a private limited company based in Walsall. The agency was registered with Ofsted in December 2014. The agency provides a range of fostering placements, including long-term, short-term, emergency, parent and child, and respite placements.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency had 122 approved fostering households providing care for 184 children.

The registered manager has been in post since April 2022. She is a qualified social worker and an experienced manager.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 28 November 2022

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 living with foster carers who provide highly nurturing care and stability. Foster carers demonstrate a strong commitment to the children in their care and as a result, children develop overwhelmingly positive relationships with their foster carers and their extended family members. Where possible, brothers and sisters live together, enabling them to maintain important family relationships. This has included groups of up to four children.

Foster carers know the children exceptionally well and are passionate advocates for their needs. One child said: 'They [name of carers] have always supported me with my wishes and dreams.' Another child said: 'Thanks to encouragement from my foster carers, I have made it to university.' As a result, children feel a strong sense of belonging and are thriving from their individual starting points.

The agency has a strong focus on children's education. At the time of inspection, 98% of children were in full-time education. For the small number not currently attending, there are clear and appropriate plans in place to support their return. A dedicated education lead works closely with carers to ensure that children's educational needs are met and that they are supported to achieve positive outcomes.

Children are supported for independence. Several children remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements, enabling them to have continuity and stability. The agency has designed independence workshops that are tailored to support children as they leave their foster carers' homes. The workshops, alongside the support provided by foster carers, ensure that children are equipped for their next steps.

Children are supported to develop their interests and talents. They access a wide range of enriching experiences, including holidays, clubs and day trips. Agency-led social events are well attended and enjoyed by children and carers. Children speak positively about these experiences and the friendships they have formed, describing them as treasured memories. One child said: 'The agency always throws a summer party, which brings everyone together and we make new friends.'

Care planning arrangements for children moving to their foster carer homes is careful and considered. The home-finding team works alongside foster carers at the point of approval. This early involvement supports effective care planning for children by ensuring a thorough understanding of the carer's skills and experience alongside the individual needs of the children.

Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in unplanned endings. The registered manager has responded by conducting reflective reviews following each ending and implementing changes, including the early introduction of therapeutic

support for both foster carers and children. These measures strengthen the stability for children.

Newly approved foster carers say that they feel valued by the agency. Foster carers spoke positively about their fostering journey from the point of enquiry through to approval. One carer described a previous experience of discrimination when applying to other agencies due to a disability. They said that the agency was proactive and strength focused. Reasonable adjustments were made to support the carer, who has since provided care to several children, with one child making significant progress in a short period of time.

Partnership working with local authorities is strong. Social workers consistently report positive relationships with the agency and its carers. One social worker, newly allocated to a child, valued the detailed knowledge shared by the carers, which enabled her to build rapport with the child quickly and effectively.

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

Foster carers provide children with warm, secure homes. Children feel safe living with their foster carers and identify them as people with whom they can share any worries and concerns. One child said their foster carers are 'absolutely outstanding people', and another said: 'My carers love me and I love them.'

Foster carers have a clear understanding of children's risks and vulnerabilities. All children have risk assessments in place that provide clear guidance on how to keep them safe. The risk assessments are reviewed regularly and updated promptly when new risks emerge. This further supports foster carers to understand children's risks and keep children safe.

The agency encourages children to take age-appropriate risks in line with their development. Supervising social workers raise professional challenge with placing authorities to promote decisions that reduce risk and support children's next steps towards independence. In addition, supervising social workers and support workers undertake direct work with children to explore individual risks and vulnerabilities. As a result, children are supported to keep themselves safe.

A key strength of the agency is its therapeutic support, which helps children and their foster carers to manage their emotions, particularly during periods of upset or anxiety. A considered approach is implemented that focuses on guiding foster carers to safely support children during periods of upset. The approach equips carers to de-escalate children's behaviours without the need for physical intervention. As a result, such incidents are rare and only used proportionately as a last resort.

Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in children going missing from their homes. While incidents are generally managed well and carers receive clear guidance, some delays in reporting have occurred. The agency responds promptly to address these shortfalls and carers' responses have subsequently improved. All

children receive a return home interview, which helps to understand the reasons for going missing and ensures that the right support is put in place.

Allegations are managed well. The registered manager takes a proactive approach to safeguarding and ensuring children's welfare. Appropriate referrals are made to the local authority designated officer when necessary. Supervising social workers undertake detailed investigations and return foster carers back to panel to review their suitability. The agency has made appropriate decisions to deregister carers when there are concerns about their practice.

However, for one carer, there was a missed opportunity to explore concerns about domestic abuse within the family home. Although appropriate action has now been taken, a lack of professional curiosity and reviewing incidents in isolation resulted in children being exposed to arguments in the carer's home.

Foster carers generally respond well when children are in crisis; however, on at least three occasions, police were called to manage a child's behaviour. This practice is not in line with the agency's ethos or behaviour management policy. The registered manager has taken swift action to address this practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is suitably skilled and qualified. She promotes a highly ambitious culture that is embedded within the staff team. The registered manager is extremely child focused and passionate about ensuring that children achieve the best outcomes. She is supported by a skilled management team whose members share her vision for the agency and the children.

The agency has a strong, stable staff team. Staff are committed and enthusiastic about their roles. A joined-up team approach ensures that children and their carers receive high-quality support. One member of staff said that the agency is extremely supportive. Another member of staff said: 'The agency is truly an amazing place to work.'

The registered manager's oversight and monitoring of the agency is excellent and extremely effective. She has a comprehensive understanding of the agency functions and has implemented dynamic monitoring tools to evaluate all areas of practice. Key members of staff also contribute to the oversight of the agency, creating an additional layer of scrutiny. As a result, themes and trends are swiftly identified, enabling proactive planning and continuous practice.

The agency has successfully recruited foster carers who reflect the diversity and the communities children live in. Recruitment is highly targeted, focusing on campaigns informed by location data to meet identified areas of need. This ensures that children are living within the boundaries of their home local authorities or nearby, enabling them to retain links to their local communities and remain in neighbourhoods that reflect their identities.

The fostering panel is diverse in terms of its membership. Panel members offer a range of experience and skills. This is further enhanced by panel members receiving training twice a year and an annual appraisal. The panel is chaired by an independent chair who knows the agency well. The panel provides a rigorous quality assurance function, ensuring robust oversight of the quality of assessments and the continued approval of foster carers. This is supported by an agency decision-maker who makes clear, timely and reasoned decisions, demonstrating a good level of reflection and consideration of all elements of the application and approval process.

Foster carers receive a wide range of excellent training that supports them in meeting the individual needs of the children they care for. Bespoke training is provided by the therapeutic team to address specific and complex needs. When required, the agency supports staff to seek additional training, such as British Sign Language. Staff are also creative and have designed several training workshops for foster carers when new concerns and needs arise.

The agency demonstrates innovative practice through joined-up working with prospective foster carers from their initial enquiry to panel. Clear communication between the first point of contact, assessor and team manager ensures that assessments remain timely and issues are addressed promptly. This approach prevents delays, supports applicants and ensures that key information is shared consistently.

Mid-point reviews provide effective quality assurance, meaning only high-quality assessments progress to panel. This process also enables the agency to identify and act quickly where applicants are not suited to fostering, ensuring that only those who fully understand the role are approved.

Foster carers have provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the support they receive from the agency. One foster carer said: 'The agency has been amazing from day 1. Another foster carer said that working with the agency is like 'a breath of fresh air'.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service approach to care minimises the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and avoids criminalising children unnecessarily. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 13, paragraph 3.10)
- The registered person should ensure that children's safety and welfare are promoted in all fostering placements. Children should be protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.1)

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: SC486357

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Inspectors

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