

Fostering Matters Ltd

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The Coach House, Steadings Business Centre, Maisemore Court, Church Road,
Maisemore, Gloucester GL2 8EY

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Matters is a small, privately owned independent fostering agency. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups and parent and child arrangements. There are currently 72 children placed and there are 98 approved foster carers and 57 approved foster carer households.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 March 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 23 May 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The agency has appointed an experienced and qualified manager to lead the service. He demonstrates an enthusiasm to improve and develop this provision. He is supported well by a responsible individual and operations director who are both very experienced.
- Children and young people enjoy living with their fostering families, and in most cases they are extremely settled. Typically, unplanned endings to placements are few, but when they do occur children and young people are supported well during the move.
- The children and young people achieve good outcomes while living with their foster carers. They receive safe nurturing care, attend school regularly and enjoy holidays and clubs that enhance their experiences and development.
- The large majority of children and young people do not go missing from home, and enjoy staying overnight with friends and families.
- Foster carers are experienced and supported well by skilled and qualified supervising social workers.
- The agency is highly regarded by its placing and partnership agencies, and responses to surveys are overwhelmingly positive.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Leaders and managers must produce a development plan that provides a strategic overview of actions necessary for the further improvement of the service.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that all foster carers complete mandatory training in line with the agency's statement of purpose.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that there are systems in place to monitor and review records effectively. Also, they must ensure that there is clear demarcation between children and young people going missing from their home or staying away with friends and family.

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
<p>Review of quality of care</p> <p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that a development plan is produced and used to improve and further develop the agency.</p>	<p>31/05/2018</p>

Recommendations

- Ensure that the registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. (National Minimum Standard 29.1). Specifically, that email notifications to the regulatory body are followed up in written form.
- Ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. (National Minimum Standard 1.7)
- Ensure foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. (National Minimum Standard 20.4)
- Ensure entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated. (National Minimum Standard 26.5)
- Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National Minimum Standard 25.2). In particular, ensure that all records and risk assessments, including procedures

to report children going missing, are reviewed regularly and updated.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people live with foster carers who provide extremely good care. The carers are experienced and knowledgeable and nurture the children and young people well. As a result, the children and young people show very good progress in their foster homes. Achievements are widely celebrated, and there is plenty of evidence of impressive outcomes. For example, young people go to university, attend college and form positive, enduring relationships. Both foster carers and social workers spoke proudly of the achievements the children and young people make.

Foster carers understand the need for children and young people to feel safe and secure. Foster carers spoke warmly and with love about the children and young people they care for, saying 'sometimes they don't want to leave' and 'they keep coming back'. Subsequently, a number of young people continue to live with their foster families into adulthood. The agency actively promotes children and young people 'staying put' and continues to support the foster carers with these placements.

Many of the placements have continued for a number of years. As a result, children and young people have developed good attachments and a sense of security and permanence. Staff work hard to support foster carers and prevent placements from ending. However, when this does happen, planning takes place and respite carers are used to reduce placement disruption.

Leaders, managers and staff maintain very positive relationships with parents, foster carers and professionals. Packages of care are individualised and regularly reviewed to ensure that they meet the changing needs of children and young people. Visits with families are supported and, where necessary, supervised. When these visits are not positive, staff appropriately challenge to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded.

Foster carers receive excellent support from their supervising social workers. Foster carers spoke warmly of this support. In particular, they said they felt safe 'knowing there is always someone on the end of the phone at any time of the day or night'. Visits to the foster carers' homes, supervisions and reviews take place regularly and, in the main, records reflect the good work the foster carers are doing. However, it was noted that some risk assessments are out of date, are not always signed by the author and require better scrutiny to ensure that they reflect the needs of children and young people accurately, especially following incidents.

The staff spoke of the importance of good quality matching and its impact on placement stability. A referrals manager coordinates information well. All necessary information is available, enabling staff to make informed decisions. Assessments of new foster carers, home visits and reports to panel are completed well and in good time. Throughout this process, new foster carers, their children and families are fully

involved.

The views of foster carers, children and young people are captured. However, the agency is aware that greater efforts should be made to promote consultation and include these views in the continued development of the agency.

A noteworthy strength of the agency is the support it gives to foster carers who look after children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. There is excellent matching of carers who are experienced and who know about the diverse needs and difficulties these children and young people face. As a result, these children and young people are helped to settle, feel safe and overcome adversity.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children and young people living with foster carers are kept safe because the supervising social workers and the foster carers understand the children's and young people's safeguarding needs. The social workers and foster carers take the necessary action to ensure that children and young people are safe in the home and out in the community. Risk assessments are in place, but some require reviewing to ensure that they reflect the specific needs and challenges that some children and young people present.

A small number of children and young people go missing from their foster homes. Staff and foster carers have a good understanding of the reasons why they go missing. Records kept provide no demarcation between times when children or young people are missing and when they are staying at friends' homes with or without permission. This means that data collected is flawed and does not represent the good work the agency and foster carers do keeping children and young people safe.

Foster carers receive a good level of training, which is available both face to face and via an online training package. Some foster carers have, however, failed to keep up to date with mandatory training. Foster carers spoken with demonstrated expertise in supporting children and young people who have suffered abuse and trauma, and in particular in the needs of safeguarding children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. This has led to positive outcomes for many children and young people.

The agency has a well-organised staff and foster carer recruitment and assessment process. Disclosure and barring service checks are completed at an enhanced level, including for visitors to foster carers' homes.

The agency is in the process of rebuilding its website. Due consideration has been given to how this platform further safeguards children and young people from inappropriate adults.

The agency has a good working relationship with placing authorities. There is sound evidence of supervising social workers, managers and leaders escalating concerns

and requesting strategy meetings to help protect children and young people from harm. Records confirm that all relevant agencies are informed when there are concerns. While the agency sends notifications to Ofsted, some notifications were delayed. During the course of the inspection, the agency was swift to action an improved process of reporting.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, there have been two changes in the position of registered manager. During an interim period, members of the senior management team managed and led the agency. One change impacted negatively on the stability of the staff team and resulted in some supervising social workers leaving the agency. The management team ensured that these changes did not impact negatively on the foster carers and children and young people.

More recently, the agency recruited an experienced manager who has successfully registered with Ofsted. The registered manager brings a wealth of experience, passion and dedication to the development of the agency. Already, there has been a considerable improvement in the management of the agency. For example, systems to review, record and monitor the quality of care have already been modified, and this has led to better collection of data. Nevertheless, leaders and managers recognise that further work is necessary to embed these systems, which in turn will reduce and prevent recording errors and improve the overall monitoring of the agency. A requirement is made to ensure that there is more rigorous monitoring of the matters set out in Schedule 6 of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers prioritise children and young people's needs. The agency is very well respected by professionals, families and foster carers. Most apparent is the warmth, commitment and dedication they all demonstrate to ensure that children and young people live in safe, loving homes.

Foster carers and staff are supported well and have confidence in the senior management team. They receive good quality regular supervisions, and team meetings are used to reflect on practice and provide support to one another. Staff spoke highly of the registered manager, saying he is 'like a breath of fresh air' and is 'fantastic'. In addition, staff remarked on the 'strength and commitment' of the responsible individual and operations manager.

The agency panel is chaired by an experienced and qualified person. They confirm that reports are timely and are of a good quality.

The statement of purpose is detailed, accurate and routinely reviewed. However, it was noted that the development plan remains in its infancy and requires further work to ensure that it reflects the ongoing progress of the agency. The manager is aware that consultation with children, young people and foster carers needs to be improved to ensure that their views and opinions are interlaced into the development of the agency.

The agency has grown steadily since it was established. This has been managed in a sustainable way to ensure that it remains financially viable.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC061740

Registered provider: Fostering Matters Limited

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Bishops Cleeve, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 7DQ

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Inspector

Linda Bond, social care inspector



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