

Asphaleia Ltd

Asphaleia Ltd
22 Liverpool Gardens, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 1RY
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This private fostering agency is part of a larger organisation, including a charity, which delivers other community-based support projects for children. At the time of this inspection, there are four approved fostering households and two children in placement. Long and short-term services are provided.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 June 2018

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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of last inspection: 17 July 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children make good progress from their starting points in long-term placements.
- Children are placed with committed carers who accept them into their wider families.
- The registered manager is developing the agency with a focus on action points to address areas for improvement.
- Members of the leadership and management team are strong, passionate about the work, and have a clear understanding of the needs of children.
- All children are in full-time education and many are achieving well there. Health needs are given a high priority.
- The agency is successful in achieving permanent care for children.
- High-risk behaviours, for example going missing from home, rarely occur in this agency. When incidents do occur, the foster carers and the agency have suitable procedures in place to minimise harm and prevent reoccurrence.
- Children feel safe and learn to make safer choices. Children speak positively on the difference that living with their foster families has made for them.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Children do not have access to the children's commissioner and independent advocates.
- Ensure foster carers have access to backup carers, and that the carer's handbook sets out their entitlement to holidays.
- The quality of care review does not include the views of children, foster carers or stakeholders, nor does it give a clear sense of the strengths and areas for development of the agency.
- Quality assurance of panel decisions is not in compliance with the national minimum standards for independent fostering agencies.
- Educational monitoring systems are not in 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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>Implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16(1)(2)(a))</p>	06/08/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that foster carers receive training on cultural and faith-based violence.</p>	06/08/2018
<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 care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b)(3))</p>	06/06/2018

Recommendations

- The fostering service must ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. (National Minimum Standards, 1.6) In particular, ensure that the complaints system is easily accessible to children and provide for access to the children's commissioner.
- The fostering service must ensure foster carers understand the nature and level of support, which will be provided to them by the fostering service. (National Minimum Standards, 2.2) In particular, ensure that foster carers have access to named backup carers.
- The fostering service must ensure that foster carers are provided with breaks

from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed. (National Minimum Standards, 21.5)

- The fostering service must ensure that the fostering service's decision-maker is a senior person within the fostering service, or is a trustee or director of the fostering service, who is a social worker with at least 3 years post-qualifying experience in a childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice. (National Minimum Standards, 23.12)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency and foster carers provide good care and support for the children looked after by this agency. The children build trusted and secure relationships with their foster carers. Many of them have long and stable foster placements. This stability is achieved due to good matching of the children with their foster carers and allows children to make good progress in areas such as health and education.

An independent reviewing officer describes a child as 'flourishing', because of the steady progress she is making, in all aspects of her physical and emotional development. Children feel that their foster carers listen to them and will make changes to ensure that they are happy with the support received.

The agency is in the early stages of creating a computer application for gaining the child's voice. Staff seek children's views at agency fun days.

Children receive good support in all areas of education. As a result, children have a minimum of 90% attendance. Consequently, children are achieving at their individual key stage, developing independent learning skills and undertaking relevant examinations, including maths and English. However, managers do not have a system in place to monitor the overall educational progress and achievements of children.

A strength of the agency is that children have access to learning delivered by other projects within the organisation. Children have attended workshops based on staying safe and appropriate use of social media. One-to-one support is available to children at risk of child sexual exploitation or currently experiencing exploitation.

The organisation's education and training programme provides education for children who are not in mainstream education. This holistic approach to childcare has a positive effect on children's well-being and provides additional support to keep them safe.

Foster carers work carefully with children, helping them to understand and reflect on their family history and cultural background, and support them in maintaining their individual faiths. A young person said, 'I felt at home from the moment I came here. The foster carers understand me, they speak my language, help me to keep my faith and cook food I enjoy. That means all is very good.'

Children enjoy a range of activities and opportunities through their foster families and the agency. Their participation has had a positive effect on their self-esteem and well-being. An example of this is a child who was shy and hesitant to take part in a large school production. However, following discussions with teaching staff, the child was given the opportunity to be the hair and makeup advisor.

Children have benefited from moves that are well managed, both into and out of foster families. The agency promotes 'staying put' arrangements, where these meet the needs of the young adult.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have developed robust systems to safeguard children and to keep them safe. Impact risk assessments, safeguarding toolkits and training for foster carers have begun to underpin their work with children.

Managers have worked well at promoting an open and transparent service where concerns are shared and appropriate challenges to each other are encouraged. As a result, a commissioner said he was 'confident' in the ability of leaders and managers to make effective changes to safeguard children. The quality of professional relationships with stakeholders and other professionals is a real strength of the agency.

The responsible individual is the safeguarding lead for the agency and is successfully building a culture aimed to ensure that children are consistently kept safe.

Children say that they feel safe in their placements. A young person said, 'The best thing about my family is that I can always go to them when I am upset and they always listen to me and make it better.'

Children do not go missing. However, foster carers understand the actions that they need to take if a child goes missing and follow the agreed local agency and police protocol. Foster carers are skilled in helping children to maintain safe boundaries and reduce challenging behaviours. There are no current safeguarding concerns.

A supervising social worker is not currently in post with the agency. However, foster carers said that they are well supported by the registered manager. She has developed good-quality relationships with the foster carers, she attends childcare meetings and makes contact with them. Foster carers said that they are confident in the registered manager's skills and commitment to children.

Children benefit from having safe and well-planned contact with their families where appropriate. Carers are familiar with these plans and prepare children for these visits, taking into account the likely emotional impact on them.

The children's guide provides good information for children about being fostered. However, the complaints guide lacks sufficient information on the process for making a complaint and does not include information on the children's commissioner. However, the agency is committed to enabling children to access other services that can advocate on their behalf.

No assessment of potential foster carers has taken place since the last inspection. An experienced foster panel chair provides good scrutiny of the panel process.

Following the last inspection, appropriate measures have been put in place to ensure that the panel is cohort. Panel members offer a wide range of expertise and specialist knowledge. The suitability of new members is reviewed through written application and interview processes, and training profiles are in place for all panel members. Panel members receive annual appraisals.

Panel minutes do not always clearly reflect the reason for panel meetings and the decisions made.

The agency decision-maker does not hold the mandatory qualifications and experience required by Ofsted. Consequently, the decision-making process is not in keeping with national minimum standards. However, her decision making process is based on a current knowledge of legislation together with extensive experience of social care.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is a qualified social worker with many years of experience in fostering. She has been in post since September 2017. The registered manager's focus is on stabilising the service and focusing and addressing the areas for improvement.

The registered manager receives good support, particularly from the registered individual, in developing her managerial skills. They have detailed development plans in place focused on improving the quality of care for children, a professional team of foster carers, and systems for monitoring the quality of care provided.

The values of the organisation are understood and embraced by the foster carers. This ensures that children are listened to and their wishes and feelings are respected. Leaders and managers demonstrated a commitment to engaging children in the future development and direction of the agency.

However, the agency has not submitted quality of care reports to Ofsted for the past two years. During this inspection, the registered manager submitted a report to Ofsted. However, arrangements for quality assurance monitoring remain poor, and do not include consultation with children, foster parents and placing authorities. Monitoring reports omit key information and do not provide the registered individual with the quality of information needed to improve the service.

Managers and foster carers build positive relationships with partner agencies that are focused on children's best interests. A robust approach to advocating on behalf of children ensures that children's holistic support needs to remain paramount.

Personal development plans introduced for foster carers ensure that the training provided is relevant, varied and of good quality. However, at the time of the inspection, foster carers had not received training on female genital mutilation and other cultural and faith-based violence. This is particularly concerning, as a number of children placed had been unaccompanied minors. The registered manager provided evidence that this training, as well as other training including criminal exploitation, is to be part of the agency training plan for the next six months.

The agency has struggled to provide carers with respite care. Foster carers lack knowledge of access to respite care and there is an over emphasis on the use of family and friends to provide respite. In addition, the foster carer's handbook fails to provide foster carers with information on holiday entitlement.

The agency's statement of purpose clearly describes the agency's aims and

objectives. However, it would benefit by clearly setting out the placement needs that the agency can meet.

The agency has addressed the majority of the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection. Leadership and management are judged as requires improvement to be good because of some breaches of regulations. These have had no identifiable impact on the care of children.

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: SC060967

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Inspector

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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