

Ideal Fostering

Ideal Fostering Limited

509 Aldridge Road, Great Barr, Birmingham B44 8NA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Ideal Fostering is registered as a private limited company. In September 2017, the management structure changed with one manager taking the overall ownership of the company. The agency undertakes recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. The range of placement types provided include emergency, long-term, medium-term, short-term and parent and child placements. On 29 June 2018, the agency had 133 children in placements and 78 fostering households.

The manager is in the process of becoming the registered manager.

Inspection dates: 25 to 29 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 **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 23 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Managers follow safeguarding process, monitor outcomes and respond appropriately when needed.
- The panel members work to timescales, challenge assessment reports and ask insightful questions. This ensures that the standards for new and existing foster carers remain high.
- Managers have developed good monitoring systems regarding education and health.
- Overall, children and young people are secure in their placements and are supported to make progress.
- Foster carers feel supported and enjoy the training that is provided to them.
- Generally, children and young people do not go missing.
- Managers and staff are enthusiastic and passionate about children, young people and foster carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Actions identified from monitoring are not always resolved in a timely way.
- Children's and young people's progress is not always evident from their starting points. There is a lack of target setting to support children and young people to progress further.
- Documentation for children and young people, such as the children's guide, is not in a format that they can access and understand.
- An annual written monitoring report has not been provided to Ofsted that contains the views and feedback of others.
- The annual appraisal of the panel chair has not been completed.
- The agency decision maker does not give enough clarity in his written reasons for the decisions that he makes.

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 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. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(2)(3))</p>	<p>20/08/2018</p>

Recommendations

- 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 Standards 25.2)

This relates to ensuring that children and young people have clear aims and objectives to support their progress. Managers and staff act on the shortfalls identified within monitoring systems in a timely manner.
- The fostering service must also compile a children’s guide to the fostering service, the details of which are set out in standard 16. It must be produced in a format which is appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of children who may be fostered by the service. In practice this means that it may be necessary to produce several versions of the guide, aimed at different age groups and including formats accessible to those with learning or communication difficulties. (Statutory guidance – Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, paragraph 4.3)
- Each panel member’s performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service’s decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair, and for this purpose

may attend a proportion of panel meetings but only as an observer. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel. For all other panel members, the panel chair should conduct the performance review. (Statutory guidance – Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, paragraph 5.15)

- In reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWCA 328 (Admin), in which the court set out guidance for the way in which an adoption agency decision maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation or the independent review panel's recommendation. This applies equally to fostering decision makers. The court said that it would be good discipline and appropriate for the decision maker to: list the material taken into account in reaching the decision; identify key arguments; consider whether they agree with the process and approach of the relevant panel(s) and are satisfied as to its fairness and that the panel(s) has properly addressed the arguments; consider whether any additional information now available to them that was not before the panel has an impact on its reasons or recommendation; identify the reasons given for the relevant recommendation that they do or do not wish to adopt; and state (a) the adopted reasons by cross reference or otherwise and (b) any further reasons for their decision. (Statutory guidance – Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, paragraph 5.40)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people have good experiences with their foster families and make good progress in all areas of their lives.

Staff support foster carers to find school placements for children and young people. School exclusions are appropriately challenged as is the use of pupil premiums when this is required. Young people are supported to progress from school (and other establishments) to colleges. As a result, all children are in education, which will support their future outcomes.

Health outcomes for children and young people are carefully monitored within the agency. Appointments do not drift as staff are aware of every appointment that each child and young person needs to attend. Foster carers have been supported to attend health appointments and with the support of the health lead within the agency some appointments have been bought forward despite long waiting lists.

The fostering agency encourages diversity. This is reflected in the wide range of characteristics and experiences of foster carers, children, young people and staff within the organisation. This allows for a wider range of placements that can best meet children's and young people's needs.

Children's and young people's views are regularly sought through visits by the supervising social workers, evaluations of activities that they have taken part in and through feedback questionnaires. The feedback viewed by the inspectors was, overall, positive, demonstrating that children and young people were happy. The agency would benefit from seeking young people's views on the existing children's guide. This is not currently child-friendly.

Foster carers are proactively involved in the matching and admissions of children and young people. The placement officer has a comprehensive knowledge of the skills of foster carers. The matching process involves key professionals in identifying needs. Consequently, there has been a reduction in unplanned endings for children and young people, meaning that more children and young people are provided with stability and security.

Foster carers are committed to looking after the children and young people in their care and are positive about the agency and feel well supported. 81% of foster carers who responded to an agency feedback form had been with the agency from the onset of their fostering careers. The role of the supervising social worker was highly praised by foster carers. One foster carer told the inspectors, 'I feel really listened to. We know the kids are important, but my social worker makes me feel like I really matter.'

Staff and foster carers are good at working in partnership with other agencies and accessing services to meet children's and young people's needs. For example, the

staff have made referrals to the sexual behavioural team so that work can be done not just with the child or young person but also with the foster carers.

Foster carers enjoy a range of training that is appropriate to the needs of the children and young people who they care for. Foster carers informed the inspectors that training was informative, enjoyable and engaging. This is positive and an area that the agency is continuing to develop. For example, a health professional has been employed to deliver further health training.

New carers spoke positively about the agency and the support and pre-approval training that they received. New carers are welcomed and prepared well for the fostering task, so that they provide positive outcomes for children and young people from the outset.

Children and young people make good progress. However, the agency needs to capture this better in its documentation. Furthermore, children and young people would benefit from achievable targets being set for them.

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

Safeguarding is an area that has much improved since the last inspection. A team manager directly oversees any safeguarding concerns and acts accordingly in line with the safeguarding policy. The agency actively consults with the designated officer in the local authority to seek advice and guidance. Following any safeguarding concerns, actions are set and a case summary completed. This allows for lessons to be learned and ensures that a clear record is completed.

Managers and staff closely monitor any children or young people who they believe may be at risk of sexual exploitation. They have a designated worker who makes referrals to the local authority if a child or young person is assessed as high risk and this is then referred to the child sexual exploitation coordinator. At the time of the inspection, only two young people were considered to be at risk of child sexual exploitation.

Children and young people rarely go missing. This is monitored by the agency, which allows for patterns and trends to be identified. No children or young people are considered to be at risk of radicalisation or gang crime.

Safer care policies and risk assessments are conducted at the start of each placement and are reviewed and updated regularly. This ensures that risks are identified and understood by all concerned.

The agency has two support workers who provide intervention to children and young people who may be displaying challenging behaviour. The support workers are creative in their approach. While working to an initial 12-week time frame, the work that they undertake is individualised and tailored to the child's or young person's needs and abilities. This allows children and young people to engage effectively in the work and understand their behaviour and supports them in making positive decisions.

Assessments of proposed foster carers are of good quality. They are thorough and explore all relevant issues. The panel members who make recommendations for potential foster carers, and continual approval of foster carers, have a wide range of experience. This allows them to consider assessments carefully and meticulously. When necessary, they will request that foster carers return to panel within a four- to six-month period to demonstrate that they have addressed any issues raised (such as not completing required training or supervision). Such rigour within the panel process promotes high expectations of foster carers.

The agency decision maker needs to ensure that his written decisions are clear. This will add further scrutiny and safeguards to the decision-making process.

Recruitment processes for staff are good and are compliant with safe recruitment guidance. This ensures that all staff are assessed to be safe to work with children and young people.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There has been no registered manager in post since September 2017. This has not had a negative impact on the agency. The responsible individual stepped into the position of the manager and is awaiting his interview with Ofsted to become the registered manager. Staff spoke about the positive changes with roles being more defined and direction and guidance now being in place.

The agency is well resourced with staff. Each staff member has a specific role with additional responsibilities that they oversee. This ensures that remit specific areas are well addressed and monitored, such as health, education, children at risk of child exploitation and foster carer training and development. Because of this, the agency has a good understanding of each child's and young person's needs and can target resources where needed.

Monitoring systems are effective at identifying key issues. However, at times, the issues are not always rectified quickly. For example, it had been recognised that the panel chair had not had an annual appraisal since December 2016. No action has been taken to address this. The agency would benefit from streamlining and consolidating their monitoring tools to create an action/development plan to prevent identified issues drifting without action.

Staff receive regular supervision that focuses on the needs of the foster carers and children and young people. Supervision documentation is well written, containing clear discussions that have taken place. Staff feel supported and enjoy regular, formal and informal supervision.

Managers and staff have a clear understanding of the agency's strengths and weaknesses. When the inspectors spoke to the staff team, they were reflective when discussing past issues and what improvements had been made within the organisation. The staff team members within the agency are enthusiastic and excited about further developments that are planned. This creates a positive energy

within the agency.

The manager has not shared an annual written report, containing the views of others, with Ofsted. However, leaders and the manager are good at listening to other people's views, evaluating that information and providing an outcome. This was evident when talking to staff, foster carers and stakeholders. A commissioner told the inspectors, 'They listen and then give feedback. It is a breath of fresh air that you don't have to chase them.'

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: SC472125

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Inspectors

Lisa O'Donovan: social care inspector

Dawn Bennett: social care inspector



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