

# Kasper

Kasper Limited

Kasper Fostering, 79 Nelson Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1DX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned, not-for-profit, fostering service that has been in operation since 1997. The service currently has 65 children placed in 56 fostering households. It provides a range of fostering opportunities for children from birth to 18 years. In addition, 'staying put' arrangements are in place for young people to remain with carers beyond their 18th birthday.

**Inspection dates:** 11 to 15 February 2019

**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:** 13 July 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- There is an excellent process for matching children and young people with their carers.
- Most young people have strong and trusting relationships with their foster carers and can therefore make very good progress across most aspects of their lives.
- Foster carers receive excellent training from the agency. This covers appropriate areas and is organised effectively and well monitored.
- Foster carers think that the agency offers 'outstanding support'. This includes support from supervising social workers and office staff.
- The agency has a strong, practical commitment to children and young people's participation in the life of the agency and this is monitored through a three-year plan.
- The foster care journey from enquiry to approval is a positive experience for carers and the process is both timely and efficiently managed.
- Individual and group training on child exploitation and using social media safely is of high quality and is appropriately accessible to those who may benefit.
- Staff who have skills in particular areas, such as recruitment or leaving care, are given excellent opportunities to develop those skills.
- Agency social workers are benefitting from a creative approach to their routine appraisals.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- There is insufficient detail recorded on the rare occasions when foster carers have to restrain children or young people in their care. This means that the agency cannot be confident that the measures used were neither excessive nor unreasonable.
- Six recommendations are made to encourage further development in the following areas: education support; psychological health support; individual risk assessments; the diversity of the foster care panel; the quality of foster carer assessments that are presented to the panel; and the accuracy of the statement of purpose.

## 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 take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13 (2)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, ensure that foster carers record episodes of the restraint of children and young people in sufficient detail, so that the fostering agency is assured that the restraint practice was reasonable and safe.</p>	<p>02/04/2019</p>

### Recommendations

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential. (National minimum standards 8)  
Specifically, consider using comprehensive agency, independent and local authority educational packages for young people who are not in education to minimise the risk of placement disruption. In addition, consider starting point recording of children and young people's educational levels, with systematic monitoring of ongoing progress.
- Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted. (National minimum standards 6.1)  
Specifically, consider routinely accessing professionals promptly in children and young people's emotional healthcare, both to directly support the children and young people and to offer clinical supervision to their carers.
- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (National minimum standards 4.5)  
Specifically, ensure that individual risk assessments clearly demonstrate what the main risks are to the child or young person. In addition, ensure that they show if the child or young person is becoming safer over time.
- The number, skills knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking

into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for.  
(National minimum standards 14.8)

Specifically, ensure that the panel membership reflects various ages, life experiences and ethnicities.

- The written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams. (National minimum standards 13.7)  
While the standard is met, the agency should ensure that the reports are consistently written to a standard that allows the panel to focus on the assessment, as opposed to grammar and typo shortfalls.
- The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility. (National minimum standards 16.1)  
Specifically, ensure that the statement of purpose accurately reflects the services available from the fostering agency and the staff who will be delivering these.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

The placement matching processes in this agency are particularly effective. They are thoughtfully carried out, efficiently processed, and strongly demonstrate effective partnership working between foster carers, key people in the agency and the local authority. There is no pressure in this agency to fill foster care vacancies, other than from foster carers themselves. As one foster carer said, 'I was waiting 10 months for the right child and I was feeling really frustrated. He has now been with us seven years and it was well worth the wait.' Although in the last year there have been some significant placement disruptions, this very careful matching generally means that children and young people are more likely to settle into a foster family, have very good experiences and make very good progress.

The overall progress that children and young people make is noted and celebrated in various ways, including at the annual achievement ceremony. Children and young people's ongoing progress is noted at reviews and most recently also by the introduction of an outcomes tracker. This useful tracker is currently being rolled out across all children and young people. Children and young people make progress in a variety of ways. For example, some achieve exceptional academic or sporting excellence while others learn new ways to communicate or new daily living skills. For some children and young people, their basic health improves, while others learn to better sustain relationships and develop improved confidence and self-esteem.

However, a small number of children and young people with significant emotional health needs do not always receive prompt professional support. This particularly applies to those children and young people who live outside their home authority. In addition, some foster carers looking after very challenging children or young people miss the clinical support and supervision they used to have. One foster carer said of a previous professional, 'He was really good, absolutely brilliant. He gave us ideas how to deal with things and try different things.' This lack of a coordinated, prompt therapeutic offer to children and young people and foster carers puts such placements under stress and does not promote children and young people's progress.

Education attendance is very good for most children and young people. A very small minority of children and young people are not in education. Although some sessional work time is offered to these families on occasion, this is not sufficient to cover, for example, a carer's working hours and does not make up an alternative educational package. These particular placements are under stress and vulnerable to placement disruption.

Most agency social workers and foster carers are aware of the education levels that particular children and young people have reached, and they are positively involved with their education providers. However, children and young people's education levels are not systematically monitored. This does not sufficiently promote educational progress for the majority.

Children and young people's views are listened to in this agency, and their comments are rightly taken seriously. Their views are routinely canvassed at review time, and in addition they comment and give ideas on, for example, how to improve the very popular holiday activities. Some children and young people are involved with training

and with interviews. There is a very strong commitment to developing a culture of participation and this is well underpinned by a thorough participation plan.

Foster carers feel that they are exceptionally well supported by the agency in caring for their children and young people. These views reflect some excellent co-working between social work and office staff. One carer summed up the views of many carers, saying, 'They offer outstanding support; they can't do enough for you. They will text and call you whenever and are so much better at it than my previous agency.' Much of this praise gives rightful credit to the great work of the agency social workers. However, foster carers were also anxious that the big contribution of the office staff was also recognised. Again, one foster carer summed this up by saying, 'The office staff are brilliant; nothing is too much trouble.'

This agency demonstrates a further strength in foster care support in guiding the foster care journey from enquiry to approval effectively. This is a well-monitored and efficient process supported by helpful publications and processes that mean would-be foster carers feel as comfortable as possible.

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

Young people are risk-rated overall using colour coding. Appropriately, those young people at most overall risk, such as those newly in placement, are the ones who are most closely monitored. However, children and young people's individual risk profiles, although routinely updated, are not so clearly recorded. This means that it is not always clear which is the main risk to that child or young person. It is also not apparent which individual risks are increasing, diminishing or staying the same. This does not fully support ensuring that children and young people are becoming increasingly safe.

Foster carers receive some excellent training in safeguarding children and young people, particularly in relation to responding to the needs of young people who may be at risk of exploitation. This input includes upskilling foster carers on social media risks, and can also involve direct work with young people on the risks they are facing. This is a very effective response to these safeguarding risks.

The agency has appropriate policies and procedures in place for when children or young people go missing from their placement. Foster carers are familiar with these. In specific circumstances, foster carers are also able to respond to local authority requests for an individualised response to a child's missing episode, and this shows appropriate partnership working.

Generally, routine behaviour management is a strength in this agency. Foster carers have regularly updated, good training in this area. The training is, crucially, underpinned by regular supervision from agency social workers that discusses any issues in depth. Foster carers usually know their children and young people well, and as such are adept at managing their behaviour, for example giving them their weighted blanket at times of stress.

Restraining children or young people is used sparingly, as is appropriate. However, when it is used, the recording that follows does not contain sufficient detail about the circumstances surrounding the event. For example, with one exception, the type of hold used is not detailed, nor is the length of time it is used for. This means that the

agency cannot be confident that the hold was reasonable and not excessive. This does not ensure that children and young people are kept safe.

Foster care preparation has a clear focus on safeguarding, and this is continued once fosters carers are approved. Unannounced visits, independent reviews and regular opportunities to refresh safeguarding knowledge all help to promote safe and comfortable homes for children and young people. Local authority colleagues are positive about the quality of safeguarding in this agency, and one commented, 'They are child-focused and do everything they can to keep her safe.'

The agency has strong, safe recruitment practices. References are verified, gaps in employment are explored appropriately and DBS checks are regularly monitored. This helps to ensure that children and young people are cared for by suitable and safe staff, foster carers and panel members.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency is managed by a permanent, suitably experienced and qualified registered manager. He is very well supported by a talented and conscientious management group whose members between them manage direct practice, key administrative functions, placement matching and other key activities. This is an agency that is growing; for example, the number of foster carer households has increased from 33 at the last inspection to 56 now. This planned growth has meant both staff expansion, notably in the numbers of agency social workers, and new geographical areas where the agency has a presence. The senior management group is actively assessing the impact these changes are having on areas such as administrative processes, panel base and the provision of sessional workers.

There are two directors in this privately owned, not-for-profit fostering agency and they are central to the strong vision – the Secure Base model – that underpins this agency's practice. The directors are a visible presence in the agency and are well known to the foster carers and some children and young people. The directors have an ambitious vision for high standards of practice throughout this growing agency and have ensured that the principles of the Secure Base model are well embedded throughout.

The registered manager has initiated some good child-focused monitoring systems, the results of which are brought together at regular management meetings. This promotes appropriate scrutiny and sharing of any vulnerabilities and enables plans to be put into place to secure safety and sometimes placements. In particular cases, for example, disruptions meetings are held so that lessons can be learned from the experience. This is good practice.

Several professionals referred to this agency as child-focused. The staying put placements that the agency supports are an example of this. Achieving and maintaining some of these placements has taken considerable management time, and on occasion the agency has had to strongly advocate on the young person's behalf. These efforts have so far resulted in some very positive and robust ongoing placements.

Generally, staff routinely receive good supervision, and there is some innovative appraisal practice in operation for agency social workers. Induction practice is

comprehensive and training programmes are broad and tailored to the specific needs of young people. Training is very well monitored and, when necessary, practice is sufficiently flexible to offer bespoke training, such as urgent training on tube feeding. Carer supervision by the agency social workers is regular, well recorded and a good mix of support and challenge.

The agency is financially viable, has a coherent development plan and has a statement of purpose in place. However, the statement of purpose is inaccurate in places, which is not helpful for those local authorities looking for placements. When this was pointed out, the agency immediately began steps to rectify this shortfall.

Not all foster carers have achieved the training, support and development standards within one year of approval. However, the agency has identified this shortfall itself and has a good, well-monitored programme to address this.

There is an effective fostering panel in place that is well chaired by a knowledgeable and experienced chair. The panel minutes are timely, accurate and clear. Agency decisions about the status of foster carers are safely made within appropriate timescales. The panel does spend time on typos and minor errors found in foster care approval reports, which is not the most appropriate expression of its quality-assurance function. The panel itself has a limited palette in terms of age-range, ethnicity and life experience. More diversity would better reflect both foster carers and the children and young people they care for.

## **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:** SC036530

**Registered provider:** Kasper Limited

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**Responsible individual:** Kate Lovell

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## **Inspector**

Bridget Goddard, social care inspector



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