

Fostering Solutions – Oundle

The Wharf House, Station Road, Oundle, Peterborough PE8 4DE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fostering Solutions (Oundle) is part of Outcomes First Group, a privately owned, independent fostering agency with offices in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The supervising social workers, who represent the majority of the workforce, are home-based. The agency provides a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, short term, long term, bridging, and parent and child placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 101 children placed in 78 fostering households.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since February 2018.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 January 2022

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: 30 October 2017

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 being supported to develop positive relationships with their foster carers. Carers are provided with training in therapeutic parenting approaches to help them to better understand the impact of children's previous life experiences. Carers learn how this might affect children's needs and behaviours and how to respond. Carers have access to specialist support and advice where this is necessary.

Carers prepare well for children moving in. Where children have moved in at short notice, carers have ensured that there were familiar toys and photos to help them to settle.

Children attend and participate in education. Children are making progress academically, and they develop social skills and confidence. Children are encouraged in their interests and attend activities such as dog agility, swimming and street dance. There are currently no children without a school placement. However, where children have struggled to maintain their school placement, supervising social workers have not requested the specialist support that is available within the wider organisation.

Children are regularly given 'star of the month' certificates for their achievements. There is a youth council in place and although the number of attendees is small, staff are working hard to encourage more children to participate. A small team of children and young people plan and coordinate regular activities for children, such as rock climbing and trampolining. A large group of carers and children went to see a pantomime over the Christmas period.

The registered manager was responsive in setting up a new support group for foster carers who care for disabled children. Carers' views have been listened to and activity days for children are more accessible and varied to meet the needs of all children.

Foster carers work collaboratively with children's families to promote and support regular visits so that significant relationships are maintained. There is one example of a shared-care arrangement, where a parent could use the carer's vehicle to ensure that the child could spend time with family over a weekend.

Foster carers support parents, and wider agencies, to understand and manage their children's behaviour. For example, a foster carer visited a child at their parent's house and at their school to ensure that the child's toileting routine was consistent. This has also helped the child to be less anxious about toileting, and the high level of consistency helps to accelerate progress.

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

Safeguarding practice and the oversight of safeguarding incidents are of variable quality.

Supervising social workers do not record all serious incidents appropriately. For example, in some instances, it is not always clear in the records when children have made disclosures and what action has been taken by professionals to protect children and their foster carers.

Similarly, there have been a small number of occasions where the recording of allegations or complaints by children is not sufficiently detailed. There is not a clear chronology of events.

Incidents have not always been discussed in supervision with the carers. Similarly, safer caring policies have not always been updated to reflect current risks.

On one occasion, a carer had given notice and the child experienced respite care at three separate placements. This is not providing consistent care or stability.

When children have raised concerns about their care, after children have moved on, staff have not always done enough to speak to children about their experiences.

In one child's records, there were judgemental views that should have been identified and challenged.

Supervising social workers have not always responded to significant changes in carers' circumstances; for example, when there was a change to a foster carer's relationship status. There is not an established process of regularly evaluating the continued financial viability of foster carers. This is necessary to ensure that children are being cared for appropriately and are having their needs met.

For some children, incidents of going missing and behaviours that may expose them to risk have significantly reduced. This is as a result of positive relationships with carers and children being provided with clear routines and boundaries.

Foster carers state that they are well supported by their supervising social workers to manage children's behaviour and to keep themselves safe.

Staff and carers are aware of the risks associated with the use of digital technology and access to social media. There is a clear policy about the use of agreements with children to monitor children's social media and internet use.

There was evidence of good risk management by carers within a parent and child placement, and carers maintained detailed records to inform ongoing assessment. In another placement, carers were providing sensitive, nurturing, but robust monitoring for siblings who had experienced a particularly traumatic life event.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is suitably experienced. He is well thought of by team members, who say that he is accessible. The team is confident in his decision-making.

There are comprehensive systems in place to monitor and report on the quality of care and outcomes for children, and staff performance. However, these monitoring systems have not identified the shortfalls in a small number of safeguarding incidents.

There has been a period, in the past year, when there was reduced management capacity and there was some impact with regard to the auditing of children and foster carer records. Team managers also provided support for a small number of carers and for staff providing out-of-hours duty. This was due to difficulties in recruiting supervising social workers.

Supervision of staff has remained regular, and supervision is recorded. However, it is not always effective, as the shortfalls in the recording of, and response to, a small number of safeguarding incidents have not been identified or addressed in supervision.

All staff and managers have access to range of training and development opportunities.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been carefully managed. Staff have supported carers to adjust to virtual meetings, and to sensitively support the impact on children, particularly where arrangements for visiting family and attendance at school have changed. Supervising social workers have continued to visit carers where possible throughout the pandemic. This has included garden visits and, on occasions, virtual visits. The pandemic did contribute to some reduced management capacity for a period.

Foster carers state that they are well supported by their supervising social workers. They receive regular supervision and describe the out-of-hours service as good. Although one fostering household has moved out of the fostering agency's geographical area, they described the support provided as 'excellent'.

Support groups for foster carers are available and are well attended. Foster carers receive long-standing service awards and staff will send gifts to foster carers to support them through events such as bereavements. When foster carers retire, some remain with the agency as a 'fostering buddy'.

During the pandemic, there was an increase in the number of fostering enquiries, and these were responded to in a timely manner. Assessment visits were completed virtually during the pandemic; however, at least one visit was completed in person. Fostering assessments are clear and statutory checks are well documented and evaluated.

The fostering panel functions well. There is timely independent oversight of assessments and reviews. The panel also reviews any instances where there have been complaints, resignations and any carers subject to allegations. There is oversight, and sometimes challenge, by the agency decision-maker.

Staff are working hard to build community partnerships with wider agencies who support children in care and care leavers. For example, the agency is working with three homeless charities by making food donations.

There is positive, constructive partnership working with commissioning bodies, and health and education partners.

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 in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's—</p> <p>wishes and feelings (having regard to the child's age and understanding), and</p> <p>religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. (Regulation 11)</p> <p>All serious concerns and safeguarding matters should be addressed effectively with a foster carer prior to any new child being cared for.</p> <p>Respite arrangements for children should be made in the best interests of children.</p> <p>Where children have been cared for by a different foster carer, every effort should be made to ascertain how they experienced their stay.</p>	<p>14 March 2022</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure must provide in particular for—</p> <p>notification of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiries involving a child placed by the fostering service provider, to the Chief Inspector,</p>	<p>14 March 2022</p>

<p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response,</p> <p>consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (3))</p> <p>There should be a distinction between investigations of harm and concerns relating to standards of care. Supervising social workers should be consistent and proactive in how they manage and record both.</p> <p>It is necessary for foster carers to be further supported to understand the allegations process.</p> <p>Where there are concerns relating to a foster carer, there is not yet an improvement plan in place detailing what is expected of the foster carer.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent, and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19)</p> <p>Supervising social workers should record information for children clearly, and in a way that is respectful of children. If wider professionals write about children in an unprofessional way, this should be appropriately challenged.</p> <p>Foster carers require reflective supervision following a difficult placement ending.</p> <p>The registered manager should ensure that procedures relating to the recording and monitoring of any serious incidents are consistently adhered to.</p>	14 March 2022

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: 1244627

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Inspectors

Cathey Moriarty, Social Care Inspector

Andi Lilley-Tams, Social Care Inspector

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