

# Heath Farm Children's Services

Heath Farm Family Services Ltd

First Floor, Marlowe House, Markerstudy Business Park, Wraik Hill, Whitstable, Whitstable, Kent CT5 3FE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Heath Farm Children's Services is a privately owned independent fostering agency. Since 2016, it has been a part of the National Fostering Group.

At the time of this inspection, there were 65 active fostering households and 108 children and young people in placement. The agency provides short- and long-term living arrangements for children looked after and has access to an educational provision and therapeutic services. There are five sleep-over houses available, along with a family-time (contact) suite, day care and transport services.

There is a manager in charge of the service who has applied to Ofsted for registration.

### Inspection dates: 9 to 13 January 2023

**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:** 10 September 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Warm and attentive foster carers care for children. They know them well. Foster carers provide care specific to the needs of each child. The aim is to give children positive experiences. The community model of support used by the agency is a particular strength. It gives children a wider social life. Foster carers say that it is like an extended family.

The quality of the relationships between foster carers and professionals is good. Feedback from placing authorities is positive. They like the agency's contribution to meetings and their availability to carers. There is good, trusting relationships between carers and children in the fostering household. Children are aware that their foster carers care, and one said, 'Miss [initial of carer] cares for me.'

Carers receive training and support relevant to the agency's models of practice. Training in non-violent resistance is well received by carers. One carer said that they wished they had this training years ago. Children can express themselves in a calmer way. They seek their carers' support when they struggle with their emotions. The agency offers therapy to carers. This supports them in working with the children. Supervising social workers said that therapy is also available to them. It gives them time and space to express themselves. This safeguards their well-being.

Foster carers value education and advocate for children. They have access to the outcome's worker. This worker provides support in managing any education issues, for instance where children do not have a school place and need tuition or the use of a child's pupil premium to support their development in all areas of their life.

Children have good opportunities to share their views and wishes. The youth participation and engagement worker provides activities. These activities enable children to express themselves. A new app to gain children's views was effectively use by a child. They expressed that they were not happy with their living arrangement, and this led to a later move. Children have opportunities to give feedback during the community model support activities. Children take part in the interview process of new staff. This helps them to feel engaged with the agency and to know how valuable their views are.

The agency helps carers to prepare children for moving on. Carers support children to develop their confidence and to prepare for their future. The agency offers a six-week programme of development. It covers a range of activities to prepare children for independence. The community support model used by the agency helps children with the moving-on process. Because of this, they are well prepared for independence.

Good plans are in place for children who live a long distance from their home local authority. Carers show an awareness of the need to maintain family ties. They work with the family-time and mentoring worker. This ensures children have time with

their family and those who are important to them. As a result, this helps children to support their identity.

The fostering panel is sensitive to applicants' needs. They use a fair process to make recommendations. Their opinions are well balanced. This ensures they have the right foster carers to meet the needs of children. Applicants receive a welcome pack with a range of information about the agency. One new carer said that the agency made it feel easy for her to be a new carer.

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

Staff support carers to respond to children when they place themselves at risk. Carers follow the correct protocols. They adhere to the procedures for reporting children missing. They work with the out-of-hours worker and other relevant personnel. Carers receive relevant training to meet the needs of children. As a result, children receive protection from people with a strong knowledge of how to keep them safe.

The agency prepares carers to manage challenging situations. They know how to handle behaviours that put children and others at risk of harm. Carers receive de-escalation training. This provides them with the knowledge and skills to support children. Carers gain further support from the foster carers' local support hub.

Carers understand the need to provide boundaries for children. They know the value of consistency in this respect. For example, one carer kept strong and consistent boundaries. This was in relation to children in their care who were at risk of trafficking. The carer worked well with them to protect and keep them safe. Because of this, a strong and trusting relationship has developed.

Staff know what to do and who to inform if they have a concern about a child's welfare. Clear procedures are in place. This includes how and when to notify relevant professionals about safeguarding incidents. Carers receive support in helping children to understand exploitation. They receive guidance to help children understand how to keep themselves safe.

Supervising social workers and foster carers know the needs of the children well. Supervising social workers update risk assessments as needed. However, a risk assessment held information that was not relevant to the risk presented by the child. This made it difficult to see what the main risks were to this child. Some risk assessments also lacked management oversight.

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

Leaders and managers are ambitious for the children in their care. The current manager has been in post since March 2022. She has sent her application to Ofsted to be the registered manager.

Leaders and managers provide a range of opportunities. These help to support the development of children. They ensure opportunities to improve outcomes that will affect their future. Managers ensure that foster carers are well supported. This helps them to provide a high standard of care to the children. Managers recognise the importance of staff well-being. They know that this affects the foster carers. This in turn feeds into the care and well-being of children.

Leaders and managers ensure a range of added services. This helps to prioritise the needs of children. For example, the family-time and mentoring worker provides extra services. They help to support children, their families, and foster carers. There is evidence of excellent progress made by children they have supported, whether this is through supervising family time or mentoring.

Leaders and managers promote close working relationships. This is to ensure that children make progress. A mentor working with a child supported them to learn to travel to college by public transport. There was strong commitment from the mentor to get the child to this stage. This was despite the challenges that needed to be overcome.

Staff receive regular and effective supervision. They have opportunities to reflect on their practice. Staff have a safe space for clinical supervision. This addresses their well-being and other personal issues. The therapy team is available to provide immediate support where needed. Staff and carers receive training relevant to the needs of children. This includes non-violent resistance, safeguarding and child sexual exploitation. However, training is not always up to date for carers and staff. Some mandatory and other required training is not completed or refreshed within required timescales.

Leaders and managers understand the agency's strengths and areas for development. They recognise its shortfalls, for example around staffing. They managed their recruitment drive to ensure they recruited suitable people to meet the agency's needs.

Good professional relationships are in place that enable effective support to children. However, managers have not followed escalation protocols when documents are missing from files. They do not ensure that the most senior officer in the placing authority is aware of their concern. This is a missed opportunity to further develop relationships with placing authorities. Also, this would improve the quality of information on children's files.

Leaders and managers ensure good matching of children to foster carers. The carer support community helps to support any living arrangement. This further meets the diverse needs of any child. However, the panel, while effective, lacks diversity.

## 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—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation (11)(a))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that risk assessments always contain relevant information about risks.</p> <p>Also, ensure that all risk assessments are monitored and have regular management oversight to ensure that they are sufficient.</p>	28 February 2023
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation (17) (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that foster carers and staff complete mandatory and required training within suitable timescales.</p>	28 February 2023
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation (8) (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, where care planning and other critical documentation are missing from a child’s file, make robust</p>	28 February 2023

representations to relevant officers in the placing authority to ensure these documents are received.	
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## Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that 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. In particular, ensure that there is a diverse membership of the panel. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.8)

## 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:** SC060386

**Registered provider:** Heath Farm Family Services Ltd

**Registered provider address:** Atria, Spa Road, Bolton, Greater Manchester BL1 4AG

**Responsible individual:** Neil McCarthy

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

**Telephone number:** 01227 9317780

**Email address:** [enquiries@heathfarm.org](mailto:enquiries@heathfarm.org)

## Inspectors

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

Alphie Khumalo, Social Care Inspector

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