

Cornerstone North East Fostering Service

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Room 2, Oxford House, Sixth Avenue, Doncaster Finningley Airport, Doncaster DN9 3GG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency has been registered with Ofsted since March 2006.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including respite, permanent, long-term, short-term and parent and child arrangements. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 17 fostering households providing care for 21 children and young people.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2019.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 March 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: 27 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children develop a sense of belonging in stable and secure fostering families. The agency supports carers to provide permanence for the children in their care. Some children have been adopted by carers from this agency, and other carers have been supported in achieving special guardianship orders. This is in addition to children living in long-term fostering placements that support them to make progress.

Children enjoy a range of activities and social events organised by the agency which help them to socialise and have fun. Carers take photos of these occasions so that children can look back and remember good times. These photos represent the children's journey with their fostering families and provide an important record of positive memories. Foster carers and children enjoy the events and holidays that the agency offers.

The agency works well with the children's social workers. As a result, the children are suitably matched with their foster families. The process for the assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough. The assessments are of good quality and are thoroughly analysed and evaluated through the quality assurance process that is followed by an experienced fostering panel. This helps to ensure that fostering families are appropriately assessed.

The agency supports careful matching of the children by providing the children and their social workers with child-friendly profiles of foster families. These profiles provide a colourful synopsis of the experience and background of the foster family household and their pets. This helps to provide the children and their social workers with a simple overview of the foster family to help them make an informed choice.

Foster carers record children's daily events in well-written records, using language that cares. These records show the strong, caring and nurturing relationships that exist in the fostering families that were reviewed.

Children's education and health needs are met. The agency and the foster carers work in partnership with the children's schools and with the local authority virtual school leads. This ensures that the children's needs are known and any actions to address any delays or issues are raised in a timely manner.

Children's views are gathered through their contribution to their carer's annual review. The agency has an appropriate range of children's guides to meet the needs of the children. The children's guides are matched to age groups and are child friendly. They explain how to make a complaint and the child's right to do so. However, the children's guides have not been sent to Ofsted. This does not enable the regulator to review and evaluate any changes in a timely manner.

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

Since the last inspection, the registered manager has ensured that the foster carers have read and understood the current policies and procedures relating to safeguarding. These are now accessible on the agency's family information hub. This helps the foster carers to understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding the children in their care.

Risks to the children are known and understood by the agency and the foster carers. The children's needs assessments identify the risk to the children and identify some strategies to reduce the potential risk of harm. However, some of the children's records do not consistently include when the police should be contacted, or what specific action should be taken when the children go missing from their foster family home.

Foster carers are provided with training in behaviour management and safe holding. This enables carers to provide therapeutic approaches to de-escalating behaviour, and safe physical techniques and strategies to keep children and others safe from harm. When physical holds have been required, these are clearly described in well-written records.

The agency ensures that all incidents are reviewed and evaluated by the manager and the staff. There is a clear focus in the agency on learning from incidents to prevent further occurrence and potential harm to the children.

The agency provides additional support to the children and their carers. Foster carers speak positively about their social worker and the agency's support workers. They describe how the support workers arrange to spend quality time with the children during the week and at weekends, which enables the carers to have some downtime. This helps to maintain stability in the home in times of need.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is suitably qualified. She provides a strong, supportive environment for the staff and the foster families. The manager demonstrates a sensitive approach to the care of the children, who are at the centre of her practice.

The agency's recruitment policy has now been updated so that it complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. This enables the agency to recruit carers to meet the needs of the children.

The fostering panel is thorough in its discussions, which are well documented. The quality assurance process is shown through the depth of discussions that take place to make clear recommendations. The agency decision-maker has suitable knowledge and experience for the role. The functions of the panel and its responsibility to meet timescales are met and recorded appropriately. This process helps with the safe recruitment of applicants to foster and ensures that approved foster carers provide the right level of care to the children.

Monitoring and audit systems in place assist the manager to identify potential gaps and areas for action. However, these systems have not identified that the staff do not consistently apply the agency's escalation policy. For example, there have been occasions when the children have not been formally matched long term with their fostering families by the respective local authorities. Although staff have made requests, this has not been followed up and escalated to the next level in line with the policy. This has the potential to affect the children and disrupt the child's sense of belonging in the foster family.

Staff and foster carers receive regular supervision. Supervision is reflective in nature and practice. The fostering families and the children are at the centre of discussions. Timescales for actions are clear and there is good reference to staff support and personal development plans, with targets recorded.

The manager facilitates a number of meetings with the social workers employed by the agency to discuss practice issues and the care of the children. This helps the staff to understand the wider network of fostering families in the agency and the presenting needs of the children. Staff are able to discuss, reflect and evaluate practice. As a result, the carers are able to speak to anyone in the agency and will receive an informed response.

Foster carers are well trained and have access to the newly formed training platform. Carers speak positively about the accessibility and quality of the training available.

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—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and the children’s guide;</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days;</p> <p>if the children’s guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child’s age and understanding). (Regulation 4 (a)(b)(c))</p>	28 April 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service works effectively with other agencies concerned with child protection, such as the responsible authority, schools, hospitals and general practitioners, and does not work in isolation from them. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the children’s risk assessments accurately reflect the safeguarding policies, paying specific attention to when the police should be informed of an incident involving a child. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 4.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service and foster carers take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police where appropriate. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the child-in-need assessment clearly sets out personalised strategies to reduce risk when children go missing from care. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 5.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service contacts the responsible authority to request statutory reviews or visits if these are overdue for any child, or if a review has not already been arranged by the responsible authority and a change in the care plan is needed, there has been a significant change in the arrangements for the child’s care or a major action (for example, a change of placement) which is not in the care plan. In particular, the registered person should ensure that staff escalate requests for information from a child’s

responsible authority in line with the agency's policy. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.6)

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: SC066812

Registered provider: Cornerstone North East Fostering and Adoption Service

Registered provider address: Room 2, Oxford House, Sixth Avenue, Doncaster
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Responsible individual: Eileen Brady

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Inspectors

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector
Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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