

Flourish Fostering

The Cedars, Holborough Road, Snodland, Kent ME6 5PL

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency and the manager registered with Ofsted in April 2020. The agency provides a range of short- or long-term placements for children on a planned or emergency basis, and respite care. The agency also offers parent and child placements. At the time of the visit, most children were living with foster carers prior to the carers transferring to this agency.

The agency has 27 fostering households, with 47 children in placement at the time of this visit.

Visit dates: 24 and 25 February 2021

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children benefit from nurturing care and are thriving despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. At the time of the visit, almost all children had been living with their foster carers prior to the foster carers transferring to the agency. These placements have remained very stable for children. Children's social workers spoke positively about the continued progress children are making. When children move into new foster homes, these plans are well-paced, and child centred.

Carers sensitively facilitate contact to ensure that this is an enjoyable and positive experience for children. Carers have shown great flexibility in adapting to the changing requirements between face-to-face and telephone/online contact during the pandemic.

All school-age children are accessing education, either in school or remotely, and are making progress. Carers demonstrate tenacity and creativity during periods of school closures in supporting children's remote learning.

Overall, children are getting the right help at the right time with proactive support from carers. Foster carers speak eloquently of the therapeutic approaches to support children's positive behaviour, taking into account any trauma they may have experienced.

The safety of children

Children receive consistent and positive care from their carers. House rules and consequences are negotiated with children and advice is sought from a wide range of external professionals around strategies. Responses to the very small number of children who have been missing from their foster homes are robust and help to reduce further episodes of children going missing from care.

Carers have a good understanding of possible risks to children while they are spending increased time online during the pandemic. Carers have received a wide range of training around safeguarding issues, which they can describe putting into practice in a therapeutic and age-appropriate way. Planning to reduce risk to adolescents balances safety with young people's need for independence.

Risks to children are discussed in detail in carers' supervision and with children's social workers. Children's risk assessments are updated regularly and set out what actions and approaches for carers to take to reduce risks to children.

Leaders and managers

Foster carers unanimously praise the support provided by leaders and managers. Carers speak of being treated as valued professionals by agency staff. Foster carers benefit from regular supervision, group supervision and small support groups. They are well prepared through training and have access to therapeutic guidance. However, a small number of foster carers are not supervised by a registered social worker.

Children are frequently spoken to by supervising social workers, and their views are well recorded following visits and within progress reports. Managers and leaders are well known to the children. Children's views are influencing the development of the agency. For instance, children have suggested that 'respite' is renamed so that it sounds more positive.

Leaders and managers have appropriately used the regulatory 'flexibilities' in the best interests of children, with appropriate governance and updating of relevant policies. The agency panel has a wide range of professional expertise. The records of the agency decision-maker need to be strengthened to record planning for support for foster carers who are new to fostering.

Foster carers and agency staff work effectively with partners to meet children's needs. Close working with schools during the pandemic is ensuring that children do not fall behind in their learning. However, there is not a systematic approach to sharing children's assessments and reports with placing local authorities, and some social workers are not aware of all the information the agency is producing about children.

Quality assurance and monitoring of the quality of care provided by the agency are still developing, although monthly audits are starting to address any potential gaps in care planning and record-keeping.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

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.

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 43, paragraph 21.8)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2568217

Registered provider: Flourish Fostering Limited

Responsible individual: Michelle Brunton-Douglas

Registered manager: Karen Heard

Inspector

Brenda McInerney, Social Care Inspector

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