

Foster Careline

Foster Careline Limited

Suite F10, The Business Centre, Oaklands Office Park, Hooton Road, Hooton, Ellesmere Park CH66 7NZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of a larger national fostering organisation, Five Rivers Child Care Limited, but operates under its own name and company registration.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including long-term, short-term, parent and child, and emergency foster care placements for children aged from birth to 17 years. Children who reach the age of 18 can continue living with their foster carers as young adults.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 39 fostering households caring for 57 children, including seven parent and child placements. It has grown significantly since the last inspection in 2018.

The current manager registered with Ofsted on 26 July 2017.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site activity. Foster carers and children were spoken to during the inspection.

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: 29 November to 3 December 2021

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	requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 29 January 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

Most children placed with this agency make good progress in all areas of their lives. They receive child-centred, individualised care delivered by foster carers who understand and care about them.

Children are highly positive about living with their foster carers and feel valued, loved, cared for, and heard. They develop strong and meaningful relationships with their foster carers and agency staff. These relationships underpin their progress and promote their self-esteem, giving them a sense of belonging in their foster family. One child told inspectors that they 'feel happy and safe, are treated like part of the family and never want to leave' their foster home.

Children are listened to. They are empowered to share their views and to provide feedback about their experiences, which then influences their day-to-day care. The development of a user-friendly, digital platform has made it easier for children to share their views directly with the agency.

Foster carers are well supported to meet children's physical, emotional and psychological health needs. Alongside the support they receive from the agency, they benefit from access to the wider organisation's education and therapy services. This provides carers with additional resources and further enhances their ability to meet children's needs.

Staff and carers have high aspirations for children. Children's attendance in education is good. There is ongoing communication with education providers and older children are supported to attend further education and secure apprenticeships. Children are given opportunities to access local, national and international participation projects. Through these projects, they are able to influence the development of the wider organisation and to educate others. An example of this is a video they have recently created aimed at informing teachers about what it is like to be a child in care.

The agency has robust systems in place to match children with foster carers, meaning children are usually placed with carers who can meet their needs. Children rarely experience unplanned placement endings. When children do move on, it is usually part of a planned move. The agency swiftly addresses concerns about placement stability and are effective in maintaining placements for children. Following placement moves, any learning and examples of positive practice are identified.

Several children have been given permanence with their foster families through long-term placements, adoption and special guardianship orders. Where appropriate, older children are supported to stay with their foster carers post 18, meaning they benefit from remaining part of their foster family into adulthood.

The agency places a strong emphasis on keeping families together, where possible, and supports children to safely keep in touch with people who are important to them. There is robust training and support in place to ensure the agency offers safe

and effective parent and child placements that promote child-centred planning. A number of children live with their siblings in long-term, stable placements, enabling them to sustain a positive family identity.

Children are placed with carers who support them to express and learn about their culture and identity and are often from the same background. The agency is taking action to recruit carers from more diverse backgrounds to increase the diversity of carers available to children and young people.

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

Children say they feel safe with their foster carers. Foster carers receive a high level of support and say they feel connected to the agency. One carer told inspectors, 'All in all, I couldn't be more happy with Foster Careline, I would recommend them to anybody. The care and support that they show to my foster child and [their] birth family goes above and beyond, which in fostering is vital.'

Foster carers provide individualised care. Most foster carers understand the needs of the children they care for and are vigilant with risk. Risk assessments and safe care plans are detailed and include strategies for carers to follow to keep children safe.

A low number of children cared for by the agency experience high-risk behaviours. Where these behaviours do occur, carers are supported with how to respond. Children's behaviour is well managed by their foster carers. There have not been any incidents of physical intervention in the last year.

During times of national and local restrictions, the agency engaged children and supported carers through a combination of virtual calls, online events and face-to-face visits. This helped carers and children to remain connected with the agency and meant that staff could continue to interact with them visually on a regular basis.

There is evidence of excellent partnership working. Other professionals are highly positive about the levels of care and communication provided by the agency. Any shortfalls in practice from partner agencies are swiftly challenged by the agency and they advocate strongly for the children in their care.

The agency undertakes appropriate checks and references during the assessment of prospective foster carers. Foster carer reviews take place within timescales and are carried out by an independent fostering reviewing officer. However, in situations where an applicant's or carer's circumstances have changed, there has not been sufficient assessment or scrutiny by the agency to consider the impact on their suitability to foster.

Recording gaps identified during the inspection had not been previously identified by managers. Records do not always reflect management decision-making or practice that is professionally curious. Improvements in these areas would further strengthen the agency's safeguarding practices.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She is supported by an operations manager and a newly appointed team manager. Together, they have a range of monitoring processes in place. However, there are shortfalls in relation to record-keeping and quality assurance processes, which were not identified by managers prior to the inspection. There needs to be greater focus on the quality of records kept by the agency as a number of discrepancies were identified, including foster carer agreements not reflecting carers' current approval status.

Although the manager is aware of safeguarding incidents and allegations and these matters had received appropriate investigation from the placing authority, they are not always notified to Ofsted as required by legislation. Action taken by the agency on one occasion was not in line with safeguarding procedures and processes were unclear, meaning the investigation may have been undermined and carers did not have access to independent support. This did not have a negative impact on the child involved.

Foster carers have access to a wide range of training opportunities. However, training to meet children's individual needs has not always been available in a timely manner. This has been identified by the agency as a factor leading to one child's placement ending in an unplanned way. The agency needs to further strengthen practices, ensuring that carers have access to child-specific training as required.

Panel processes need to be strengthened. Meetings are quorate but minutes do not routinely reflect quoracy or the reasons for recommendations. The processes for sharing minutes need to be clearer to ensure the agency decision-maker is in receipt of the final minutes. The agency decision-maker makes an informed decision in good time, but it is not always clear when carers have been informed orally of this decision. Panel members have been appraised but the agency decision-maker has not appraised the panel chair as required by legislation.

There were seven recommendations made at the last inspection. Six of these have been met. One recommendation relating to management monitoring has not been met.

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, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must—</p> <p>give X notice in writing, specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and</p> <p>enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the "foster care agreement"). (Regulation 27 (5)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is specifically in relation to ensuring that the fostering agreement reflects the foster carers' current approval status.</p>	18 February 2022
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must, without delay, notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	18 February 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. This specifically relates to monitoring the quality of the records kept by the service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days

and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.10)

- The registered person should ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising and distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.5)
- The fostering service should make support, which is independent of the fostering service, available to the person subject to the allegation and, where this is a foster carer, to their household. This support is to provide a. information, and b. advice about the process emotional support; and, if needed, c. mediation between the foster carer and the fostering service and/or advocacy (including attendance at meetings and panel hearings). ('Volume 4 Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Section 3.70)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service must make a clear distinction between investigations into allegations of harm and discussions over standards of care. ('Volume 4 Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Section 3.72)
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair. ('Volume 4 Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Section 5.15)

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: SC408585

Registered provider: Foster Careline Limited

Registered provider address: Suite F10, The Business Centre, Oaklands Office Park, Hooton Road, Hooton, Ellesmere Port CH66 7NZ

Responsible individual: Martin Leitch

Registered manager: Pauline Fitzgerald

Telephone number: 0151 3786873

Email address: admin@fostercareline.com

Inspectors

Caroline Bertram, Social Care Inspector
Rosemary Chapman, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children’s social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children’s services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.reports.ofsted.gov.uk/.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: www.eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021