

# Foster Careline

Foster Careline Limited

Suite G7, 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

Foster Careline is an independent fostering agency that operates in the North West. It is part of a larger organisation that operates nationally, Five Rivers Child Care Limited. Foster Careline operates under its own registration.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including long-term, short-term and parent and child placements. The agency offers care for children aged from birth to 17 years. Children who reach the age of 18 years can continue living with their foster carers as young adults. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 36 carer households providing care to 53 children.

The previous manager left the agency in December 2024. A manager has recently joined the agency. She has not submitted her application to register with Ofsted.

This inspection was completed primarily on site at the office. However, some inspection activity was completed remotely. Inspection activity included speaking with managers, supervising social workers, foster carers, children and other professionals.

### Inspection dates: 17 to 21 February 2025

**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 November 2021

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Foster carers and children have positive experiences of being part of this agency. One foster carer said, 'I found the initial contacts really impressive, and it felt right for me.'

Children feel welcomed into their foster homes and included as part of the foster family. Foster carers provide good care to meet the individual needs of children, although the agency does not always ensure carers are provided with up-to-date care plans for children. Foster carers support the children they care for to develop trusting relationships with them. One older child said that they 'wouldn't change anything about my experience'. One young child said of her foster carer, 'She's just the best.'

Most children who come to live with foster carers remain with their foster families for as long as they need. The agency has enabled foster carers to continue supporting young people who need this after they are no longer required to do so. An example of this was a young parent who was placed with her child and remained with the foster carer until she was ready to move out after her child was no longer with her. A number of children have remained with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements after they turned 18 years old.

The agency offers children the opportunity to join in a youth council to enable them to share their views and experiences with the board of governors. In addition, children are supported to join in creative projects, such as making videos, podcasts and resources that are then made available to other children who come into care, or in some cases to the public. This helps children to develop their writing and creative skills, as well as to consider their aspirations for the future.

Foster carers and social workers have access to support from education professionals within the agency. This enables foster carers to better support children with their schoolwork, provide challenge to education provisions and access additional tuition for children. When needed, the education team can help foster carers to develop their own academic skills to enable them to continue to contribute to children's educational opportunities.

Children are supported to maintain their relationships with people who are important to them, such as their parents, siblings and grandparents. This helps children to understand their family identity. However, the agency does not always proactively identify when children would benefit from professional support to better understand their journey into care.

Foster carers are well supported by their supervising social workers, describing their support as 'exceptional' and 'above and beyond'. Foster carers benefit from regular support groups that enable them to develop their network with other foster carers and share practice, ideas and learning with one another. External speakers are

occasionally brought into these support groups to further support carers' learning. However, foster carers with pre-school-aged children struggle to access these support groups as they are not designed for young children to attend. This does not enable all foster carers to benefit from the groups.

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

Children say that they are happy living with their foster carers and that they enjoy trying different activities. Children say that they know the supervising social workers in the agency who see them and listen to their views. However, this is not always accurately recorded on the agency's internal recording system.

Most of the children cared for in the agency are well matched to their foster carers' experience and skills. However, processes for considering if foster carers can meet children's needs are not sufficiently robust, and the agency does not always account for recent events in the fostering household or the impact these could have on the foster carers or children placed. This does not provide assurances that children are likely to remain in their fostering families for as long as is needed.

Foster carers contribute to individual plans for children to ensure that each child is cared for in a way that works for them and that all vulnerabilities and risks are considered. When children stay overnight with alternative carers, these plans are shared with the alternative carer to ensure that they have a good understanding of how to respond to children.

Social workers complete thorough assessments of prospective foster carers to understand their skills and vulnerabilities. While these are necessarily rigorous, foster carers say that their assessing social workers completed these assessments with empathy and warmth.

Foster carers speak positively about the learning they took from the initial foster carer training provided by the agency. They feel that the training prepared them to successfully care for their first children. Birth children are provided with a 'mini' course to better help them to understand their family's fostering responsibilities. This helps the whole family to prepare to foster. One birth child said, 'This really helped me in the beginning.' Carers work through their training, support and development standards throughout their first year to consider what they have learned from practice.

Supervising social workers undertake unannounced visits to foster carers at least once a year to ensure that children are receiving the quality of care expected at all times. Supervising social workers speak to children during these visits to understand their views and experiences in their foster home.

Foster carers are provided with a variety of training to meet the common needs of children that they may care for. However, training to meet specific identified needs is not always provided. This meant that a new foster carer, with no medical background, was caring for a young person who had epilepsy, with no training

provided to meet this medical need. The foster carer was able to manage this successfully with no detrimental impact on the child in their care.

Foster carers benefit from annual reviews of their fostering skills and suitability, to ensure that children continue to live in safe homes. Additional training is identified and recommended in these reviews. However, recommended training is not routinely completed in the following year.

When serious incidents occur, managers inform the regulator and ensure that updates are provided regularly. The agency implements learning from serious incidents. Following a tragic accident in the agency, managers implemented mandatory safe sleep and sudden infant death training for foster carers caring for young children. This helps to ensure that infants and toddlers are as safe as they can be.

The agency responds appropriately when children go missing from their homes. Foster carers try to find children who are missing and work well with the agency and other professionals to bring children home safely. External professionals say that communication from managers and social workers in the agency is 'excellent'.

When children raise concerns about the care they receive, social workers and managers in the agency take their concerns seriously. The agency shares information with other professionals and, when needed, completes its own investigations to better understand children's experiences. Similarly, managers respond effectively when foster carers make a complaint.

Managers and social workers in the agency are supported by a therapeutic support team. The clinical lead attends regular safeguarding meetings and leads reflection sessions for staff. This ensures that all social workers are aware of families who are struggling and have the information they need to support families if they call for help outside of regular working hours.

Safer recruitment processes are followed. This ensures that all staff are safe to work with vulnerable children. When concerns are identified, managers act swiftly and effectively to ensure that children remain safe.

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

Since the last inspection, the agency has been managed by a long-standing manager who retired shortly before this inspection. The manager was supported by the team manager. A new manager joined the agency the week of the inspection, and staff are excited about the direction she may take.

Staff and foster carers consistently speak of the 'amazing support and passion' that the team manager in the agency has provided. However, it is apparent that the team manager has had to supplement the emotional support to the team that should have been provided by higher managers.

The agency's supervising social workers are skilled and knowledgeable. They provide consistent support that foster carers consistently describe as 'amazing', with one carer saying, 'they couldn't do any more for me'. Supervising social workers provide additional support to families that are struggling and check in on carers' welfare when difficult dates arise.

The agency has a practice educator who supports student social workers in their placement year. In addition, they have supported new social workers in their first year of social work practice. The social work team gets involved in supporting student social workers, which supports the development of the whole team.

Staff are provided with ongoing training and benefit from an annual agency conference that considers research in practice with a variety of guest speakers. However, many staff have not completed their mandatory training required by the agency. Some staff have also not received performance appraisals or development conversations throughout the last three years. This does not ensure that staff are provided with opportunities to develop their skills.

Staff have manageable workloads to enable them to provide a high level of support to the families they work with. Staff supervisions are typically completed regularly; however, not all staff have received supervision through difficult times in their practice. In addition, staff do not feel that their well-being has been prioritised by the agency, although they do feel that the team manager has stepped in to provide this for them informally.

The management team uses a variety of tools and spreadsheets to monitor incidents and the care of children. However, there is no evidence that these are being used effectively to improve practice and identify patterns, themes and trends over a period of time. This does not support managers to implement meaningful oversight.

The agency approves foster carers based on the number of bedrooms available for fostering. This is not only confusing but means that language used is not always child-centred, with siblings sometimes considered to be one 'placement' rather than two (or more) children. Due to the confusion this system has caused, one foster carer was identified who was caring for more children than they were approved for. This has not impacted on children's care or well-being. However, managers had not identified this as an unregulated placement.

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

## Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—</p> <p>the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate. (Regulation 28 (1) (4)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that the foster carer's approval is consistent with the children they care for.</p>	24 April 2025
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that all staff receive an annual appraisal to enable them to consider their support and development needs, that staff must complete all mandatory training in the timescales required and that staff are provided with consistent supervision, especially through challenging times.</p>	24 April 2025
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))</p>	24 April 2025

Specifically, the registered person must ensure that foster carers and social workers are provided with updated care plans, review minutes, education plans and health assessments to ensure that children receive care in line with their updated plans.	
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## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that support and training are 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. This recommendation was issued at the last inspection and has been restated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the management team regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. This recommendation was issued at the last inspection and has been restated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to access support and groups that meet the needs of the children they care for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.4)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the agency supports foster carers to understand the important supporting role they play in encouraging children to reflect on and understand their history. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.7)

## 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 Ltd

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

**Responsible individual:** Jacob Strydom

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspectors**

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Leanne Carr, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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