

Lighthouse Fostering

Lighthouse Fostering Limited
Quayside House, Standard Quay, Faversham, Kent ME13 7BS
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Lighthouse Fostering is a privately owned independent fostering agency registered with Ofsted since 2014. It currently has 11 active fostering households with 11 children and young people in placement. The agency provides short, medium and long-term foster placements for children looked after as well as parent and child placements and remand placements. The current manager has applied to be registered with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 December 2019

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: 21 January 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 and young people receive high-quality individualised care from foster carers who want to make a positive difference to young lives. This gives children and young people an opportunity to experience stability and develop strong attachments to their foster carers. For example, some call their foster carer 'Mum' and tell their carers that they 'love them' and others simply say that they now 'feel part of a family'. This nurturing care enables the children and young people to make progress, especially in their confidence and emotional well-being.

Relationships, particularly between local authority social workers, foster carers and agency social workers, are usually extremely positive. As one local authority social worker said, 'We work as one team, which isn't always the case with other fostering agencies.' This team approach strongly benefits children and young people and increases their chances of successfully thriving in their placement.

Foster carers now feel very well supported by their agency, although this was not always the case. They are confident that visits will happen as planned, that their recording logs will be read and actioned, and that they will be listened to. As one foster carer said, 'All the staff are lovely, they always have time to talk, nothing is too much trouble. They are a really nice team.' This high level of support from the agency means that foster carers are able to give similar levels of support to the children and young people in their care.

Not all children and young people are in full-time education. Foster carers do what they can to encourage this, but agency workers and managers lack focus on resolving this issue. They are not proactive enough in initiating liaison with education professionals, and generally educational attendance and attainment are not given enough high priority for active monitoring and action. This means that some children and young people miss out on valuable opportunities to increase their skill base.

Children and young people's views about their care and their history are carefully listened to and taken seriously. However, hearing children and young people's views about the fostering service is less well developed. There are missed opportunities for this to happen, for example in revising the outdated children's guide of the service. In addition, children and young people are not sufficiently involved in noting their own progress where appropriate. The currently used outcome trackers are again outdated and lack a structured process around them.

Children and young people strongly benefit from appropriately structured days, warm relationships, and a predictable and safe home environment. This reduces their anxieties, keeps them comfortable and helps them to relate positively to other children and young people. In addition, foster carers strive to offer activities to develop children and young people's interests. For example, one foster carer uses their spare bedroom as 'rap central' where their young person can pursue his musical interests. Another foster carer welcomes her young person's friends round and often cooks for them. As another child said, 'We do all sorts, we go out, we watch movies, we have fun.'

Foster carers are keen to embrace their young person's cultural needs and preferences. For example, one foster carer has learned the skill of doing dreadlocks and another has learned how to make a certain pudding just as her young person likes it. These efforts help children and young people to develop a sense of their own identity and importance.

Foster carers are very positive about the process of initially approaching the agency and then being assessed. They are impressed by the thoroughness of the process, and are also very clear that they found their assessment processes both personally enlightening and invaluable in understanding themselves and their approach to caring.

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

This agency now has a strong safeguarding practice. Risk assessments are effectively completed in a timely manner, and the approach to safeguarding challenges is thorough and usually effective. For example, isolated examples of substance misuse are decisively dealt with in co-ordination with other agencies and result in good outcomes.

Patterns of young people who go missing from the foster home are clearly tracked, processes are carefully followed, and appropriate discussion is held with the young people. In one particularly concerning case, missing episodes gradually decreased and have now stopped. A local authority social worker noted how 'persistent' agency workers were in successfully pursuing return home interviews.

Foster carers are usually effective at keeping children and young people safe, for example by encouraging them to talk about their wishes to engage in risky behaviour and then putting appropriate safeguards in place. As a young person said, 'I feel safe here because, if I need help, I will get it. If I am in a state, she calms me down.'

Foster carers benefit from detailed face-to-face safeguarding training, and staff receive an appropriately extended version of this. Safer placements are further promoted by good-quality safe care plans and unannounced visits. Those placements that are identified as particularly volatile receive weekly supervision visits initially, alongside daily written reports. This careful focus on safe placements means that the local authority social workers spoken to are confident that their children and young people are being appropriately safeguarded.

Foster carers generally manage children and young people's behaviour well, because they know and understand their triggers and vulnerabilities. They manage potential stressors by using individualised strategies such as giving the young person a proxy comforter to carry with them into stressful situations. Foster carers are trained in de-escalation strategies and do not routinely use physical restraint.

The agency operates safer recruitment practice. For example, if appropriate references cannot be supplied, then appointments are not continued. Newly appointed staff are subject to a formalised probation process, which helps to confirm that they are suitable for the specific post.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, a new manager has been appointed. She has been in post since July 2019 and she has applied to be registered with Ofsted.

There is an effective leadership and management team in place, which has taken bold steps to improve the agency since the last inspection. In addition to the new manager, the agency has moved offices, recruited new social work and office staff and overhauled key procedures. These changes have been effective in promoting improvement, and the business plan reflects sound aspirations for steady growth.

This agency now has appropriate staffing and is delivering high-quality services to children and young people through their well-supported foster carers. External colleagues praised this agency's communication with them. A commissioner said, 'They are a lovely little small provider who listen and have great potential.' Social work colleagues noted that the agency both 'challenges practice' and 'works collaboratively' as appropriate. This helps promote the best outcomes for children and young people.

The agency has active monitoring systems in place. There are systems for monitoring daily activity such as ensuring that carers' logs are read and actioned, as well as overview activity, such as thorough bi-annual file audits. However, there is not yet an effective and consistent system that responds to concerns raised by audit activity.

Supervision and appraisal systems are strong. All staff feel well supported and supervision is an appropriate mix of challenge and support. Training and development are further areas of improvement since the last inspection. Foster carer attendance at mandatory courses is back on track, and relevant, new training is about to start. All foster carers have achieved their training, support and development standards in foster care.

The agency has recently appointed a part-time psychotherapist to work primarily with the foster carers and children and young people. This post is aimed at increasing development opportunities throughout the agency and is reflective of the complexity of the children and young people now being cared for. This important role is already demonstrating its worth in helping the foster carers to understand what is being communicated by complex behaviour.

Matching is strong, with a careful process that fully involves the foster carers. The regularity of foster carer supervision is appropriately linked to risk and complexity, and it reliably happens. Foster carers find supervision helpful and particularly value the high-quality out-of-hours support that they receive, if necessary. Foster carer recruitment has been purposefully slow during most of the last year to enable energies to be focused on change. More recently, this has changed and three new foster carers are coming to the panel in the next month.

There is an effective panel in place with good succession plans for forthcoming changes, and sound oversight from the agency decision-maker. Although there are plans to introduce an appropriate young person onto the panel, there is scope for more diversity, especially in terms of ethnicity. Panel minutes are usually prompt, clear and accurate. However, there is room for more detail in minutes about

standards of care issues to ensure that decision-making is appropriately well informed.

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 promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16(1)(2)(a))</p>	30/01/2020

Recommendations

- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. (National minimum standard 1.7)

This particularly relates to ensuring that children and young people are involved in all aspects of the fostering service, particularly in areas where they can strongly contribute such as updating the children's guide.

- Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (National minimum standard 26.6)

This particularly relates to ensuring that children's progress is clearly detailed in an accessible fashion.

- The fostering service implements clear written policies and procedures on recruitment to, and maintenance of, the central list of persons considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list") and on constitution of fostering panels. (National minimum standard 14.1)

This particularly relates to ensuring that panel members are a diverse group, particularly in relation to ethnicity.

- The panel chair ensures 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. (National minimum standard 14.7)

This particularly relates to ensuring that panel minutes covering standards of

care issues contain enough detail to enable sound decision-making.

- The manager 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. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standard 25.2)

This specifically relates to ensuring that there is an effective system in place to implement the findings of file audits.

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: SC479090

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Inspector:

Bridget Goddard, Ofsted inspector



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