

Aspris Fostering Services

Aspris Children's Services Limited

The Dairy House, 1 Mathon Place, West Malvern Road, Mathon, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR13 5NZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency provides short- and long-term placements for children up to the age of 18, sibling groups, parent and child placements and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 42 fostering households and 70 children being cared for by foster carers.

The manager is appropriately qualified and experienced. However, he is yet to apply to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 August 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 requires improvement to be good

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

Date of last inspection: 8 April 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Foster carers are committed to meeting children's individual needs. As a result, the children are making good progress living with their foster families. Foster carers speak positively about the support provided to the children by the agency staff. For example, agency staff have purchased a talking aid to support one child to communicate.

The children are sensitively supported to move in and settle with their foster families. They receive a welcome box from the agency, which includes a children's guide. The agency currently only has one guide. This is not suitable for children of all ages and stages of development. The manager has recognised this as an area for development and is planning to develop and introduce a total of three age appropriate guides.

The children make progress with their education, with some of the children achieving beyond what was predicted educationally. For example, one child has a conditional offer to university to study biochemistry. Another child has successfully completed their college course in health and social care and has continued working on a voluntary basis over the summer holiday alongside other volunteering work.

The children are active members of clubs and community-based activities. They are supported to maintain family links and sustain relationships that are important to them. Foster carers work closely with other professionals, including teachers, social workers and health consultants. As a result, the children's needs are being identified and met and they are supported to make positive progress from their starting points.

The achievements of the children and foster carers are recognised and celebrated. All the children receive acknowledgements for their successes, for example when they learn a new skill, such as riding a bicycle, participating in an event or completing an exam.

The children's health needs are met well by the foster carers and agency staff. They work effectively with others as part of a team to support the children they care for. The agency staff are proactive in ensuring that the children receive the specialist help and support they require. For example, the agency commissions a therapist who runs specialist focused training and regular sessions for individual foster families.

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

The children are kept safe because foster carers and staff understand the risks the children face. When necessary, foster carers discuss their concerns with their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. Appropriate care strategies are implemented, which reduces risks and promotes the children's continued development.

Detailed risk assessments and safety plans are in place. These are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Foster carers and staff receive a wide range of safeguarding training that promotes child protection and positive parenting. This ensures that they have the knowledge and skills they need to care for the children well and keep them safe.

The children are supported to develop age-appropriate independence skills in a safe and planned way. Foster carers help the children learn through day-to-day discussions and planned opportunities. The agency staff carry out focused work with individual children. They have also recently organised a group residential event that focused on providing educational and information-sharing opportunities to those children moving towards adulthood and leaving care.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. On occasions when children have gone missing, the foster carers and staff have responded appropriately and acted in line with the child's plans. Foster carers and staff ensure that they notify and work with partner agencies. These actions help to promote and maintain the children's welfare.

Foster homes are safe and secure and protect the children from harm or the risk of harm. They provide comfortable and welcoming environments in which the children feel safe and can grow and develop.

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

The registered manager has recently resigned and left at short notice. The organisation has taken urgent action to find a replacement manager, who is suitably skilled and qualified. At the point of this inspection, the manager had only been in post for four weeks. Despite this, he is responding to shortfalls as they emerge and is taking proactive actions to develop the service.

There has been a consistent and stable staff team and community of foster carers until the beginning of this year. Since then, the fostering agency has lost several highly experienced staff and foster carers. Leaders and the new manager have started a process of listening to and reassuring foster carers and rebuilding the staff team.

As an interim measure, leaders and the manager are using experienced agency staff to fill some of the staff vacancies. Elements of the safer recruitment process have not been followed for the two most recently recruited staff. Shortfalls were being addressed by the manager during the inspection.

There has been a disconnect between the fostering agency and the wider organisation. Information from the fostering agency has not been shared effectively and there has been a lack of support and challenge from the wider organisation of practice in the fostering agency.

An example of this can be seen in the service review report. This highlighted there had been no enquiries made by perspective foster carers and no new assessments or approvals of foster carers. This report was written by the previous registered manager and seen by the organisation, but actions were not taken by either party to address concerns. The previous registered manager and wider organisation did not put a marketing, recruitment and retention strategy in place or set targets for the recruitment of foster carers.

The previous registered manager carried out internal monitoring in line with regulation. However, reports were not sent to Ofsted in a timely way, with the last report being received in 2020.

Leaders and the newly appointed manager have a service development plan in place. This is being constantly reviewed and added to as matters arise. This plan includes actions to ensure that there is governance, collaboration and compliance moving forward.

Overall, there are systems in place to support staff. There is evidence of good supervision of staff. Some staff have not received annual appraisals and there is no evidence of the previous registered manager being supervised by the responsible individual. There is an established process for the induction of staff, which the recently employed agency staff are working towards. However, the manager's and leaders' current priority is to ensure that there is continuity of supervision and support for children and foster carers. There is a programme of mandatory training for staff, as well as additional and specific training. Moving forward, this will be made available to new staff as they are recruited.

The fostering agency's panel chair is knowledgeable and experienced. Panel members identify areas of vulnerability to explore with the assessor and prospective foster carers. They provide well-considered recommendations of the prospective foster carer's suitability to foster. The agency decision-maker is a qualified social worker and provides a clear rationale when approving foster carers. However, panel members have not had the opportunity to join with the agency staff for an annual training and development day.

Staff ensure that they make child-centred decisions when matching children with their foster carers. For example, specific training is offered to foster carers. This means that they are confident in meeting children's needs and feel supported by the agency. Managers track the training carried out by foster carers. However, in some cases, training dates have expired and refresher training has not been completed.

This agency has always had very clear values and ethos. Foster carers describe 'good-quality support' and 'high aspirations' for children. Due to the changes in staff personnel and leadership, foster carers are understandably anxious about the future of the agency. Leaders and managers are sensitive to this and are currently implementing plans to reassure fosters carers and stabilise the service.

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>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p>allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>30 September 2023</p>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p>	<p>30 April 2024</p>

<p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2))</p>	
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and</p> <p>needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that the organisation and responsible individual have a good operational overview of the fostering agency.</p>	<p>31 October 2023</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>ensure that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation, and</p> <p>provide all employees with a job description outlining their responsibilities.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must operate a disciplinary procedure which, in particular—</p> <p>provides for the suspension of an employee where necessary in the interests of the safety or welfare of children placed with foster parents,</p> <p>provides that the failure on the part of an employee to report an incident of abuse or neglect, or suspected abuse or neglect, of a child placed with foster parents to an appropriate person is a ground on which disciplinary proceedings may be instituted.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (2)(b), an appropriate person is—</p> <p>in any case—</p>	<p>30 September 2023</p>

the registered person, or the manager of the local authority fostering service (as the case may be),

an officer of the Chief Inspector,

an officer of the responsible authority, or the area authority (if applicable),

a police officer,

an officer of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children,

in the case of an employee of an independent fostering agency, an officer of the placing authority,

in the case of an employee of a fostering agency, an officer of the local authority in whose area the agency is situated.

The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—

receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c) (4)(a))

The specifically relates to ensuring that the registered manager is supervised on a regular basis by the responsible individual and that all staff receive an annual appraisal.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure that sufficient foster carers are responsive to the current and predicted future demands on the service. Planning for future demands should cover the need for short breaks for disabled children. This specifically relates to having a marketing and recruitment strategy in place that sets clear recruitment targets. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 28, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, including hard-to-reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This specifically relates to ensuring that foster carers' training is monitored to make sure that there is no drift in them attending refresher training. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 40, paragraph 20.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children receive the children's guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the

children's guide in a way that is accessible, subject to the child's age and understanding. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 33, paragraph 16.3)

- The registered person should ensure that each person on the central list is given the opportunity to attend an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 48, paragraph 23.10)

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: SC033934

Registered provider: Aspris Children's Services Limited

Registered provider address: Aspris, The Forge, 43 Church Street West, Woking, Surrey GU21 6HT

Responsible individual: John Anderson

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 01684 560333

Email address: johnanderson@aspris.com

Inspectors

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector
Stacie Sharpe, 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 looked after children, 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 <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://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 2023