

Lorimer Foster Services

Lorimer Foster Services Limited

2a Carrington Lane, Sale, Cheshire M33 5ND

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Lorimer Foster Services is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The agency was registered with Ofsted in July 2004. It provides a range of emergency, short-term, respite and long-term placements for children who are unable to live with their birth families.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing foster care for 37 children in 29 fostering households.

The registered manager's post has been vacant since December 2022. A new manager has been appointed. She has applied for registration with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 6 to 10 November 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: 12 August 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children live in stable and secure foster families. They are welcomed into their foster families and experience warm and loving care. Children are helped to develop a sense of belonging in their foster families and know that their foster carers and agency staff care. One child said, 'I don't know how they [the agency] did it, but it's like I've found my people.'

When possible, children remain with their foster families into adulthood. This helps them to continue to benefit from the care they receive throughout their lives. The agency also helps children to live with their brothers and sisters in line with their plans. This enables siblings to grow up together and helps them to sustain a positive family identity.

The agency is proactive in supporting children to move into their foster homes in a planned way. Children have access to a range of resources that help to prepare them for moving in. They receive information about their foster carers and a children's guide to fostering that is presented in an age-appropriate format. This helps to reduce anxieties that children may have and supports them to settle into their new homes.

Children are helped to understand their heritage. Foster carers are proactive in promoting children's cultural needs and helping them to explore their identity. This helps children to feel valued and understood.

Foster carers help children to strengthen and maintain their relationships with their families and other important people in their lives when it is safe to do so. Foster carers show resilience and commitment to developing and maintaining relationships with children's families. As a result, children experience positive and loving care from the adults in their lives.

Children are fully involved in their foster families. They have opportunities to engage in lots of new experiences and to have fun. Children's individual interests and talents are actively encouraged, such as attending boxing lessons or art classes. These opportunities help to improve children's self-confidence and social skills.

Written records provided by foster carers do not always reflect children's care and their daily experiences in ways that are helpful to children. This has the potential to be stigmatising for children, should they wish to see their care records.

The agency has a small number of foster carers who provide long-term care for children with complex and additional needs. These carers know the children extremely well and are skilled in communicating with children who are non-verbal. They quickly recognise and respond to children's non-verbal cues and are able to ensure that children's physical and emotional needs are being met.

Foster carers and agency staff are good advocates for children. They are proactive in ensuring that children's health needs are met. They use their knowledge of children to identify issues of concern and to support children with the help they need to stay healthy.

Foster carers and agency staff have high aspirations for children. They celebrate children's achievements and support them to develop a sense of purpose. Consequently, most children make good progress in education, training and employment when living with the agency's foster carers. One child who was not regularly accessing education before moving to live with her foster carers has been supported to have a positive move to high school. She has made progress in terms of her participation and attainment in school. Another child has made significant progress. He has completed his GCSEs and gained full-time employment and has now begun saving towards a mortgage.

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

Children said that they feel safer because of the care they are receiving. They can identify adults that they feel safe to share their worries with. Children feel listened to and know that their concerns are taken seriously and acted on.

Through discussion with foster carers and key adults involved with their care, children are helped to better understand their own risks and vulnerabilities. This enables them to become safer in the longer term. Risk assessments and safer care plans support foster carers to safely care for children. However, children are not provided with age-appropriate versions of these documents to help them to better understand their own care.

The agency's children's worker provides children and foster carers with valuable support. Children said that this member of staff listens to them, gives them a safe space to process difficult feelings and helps them to better understand their fostering experiences. The children's worker ensures that areas of need are quickly identified and a clear plan for support is agreed. However, the progress of these plans is not clearly reflected in children's records. This limits management oversight and reduces opportunities to evaluate the progress children are making.

In response to risk, foster carers and supervising social workers act quickly and follow agency procedures. Their actions are not always represented fully in children's records. This is a missed opportunity for oversight and learning from serious incidents.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. When this does happen, foster carers know what to do. They follow the written procedures in place for each child and ensure that information is shared with all professionals appropriately. Children receive a coordinated response and are helped to return home safely.

For the small number of children with additional and complex needs, there is a lack of clarity around foster carers' use of care that restricts children's movement.

Additional training to ensure that foster carers are caring for children safely has not been implemented in a timely manner. Although this shortfall has not had a direct impact, it leaves children and carers vulnerable.

Allegations against foster carers are well-managed. Investigations are clearly recorded and the rationale for outcomes is reasonable and proportionate. Information is shared well with all other professionals. Carers are offered independent support and advice.

Panel oversight of foster carer reviews following allegations is robust. On occasions, training that has been identified as necessary for carers as a result of allegations has not been completed until several months after the initial incident. This reduces opportunities for foster carers to develop their practice in a timely manner.

There are regular checks undertaken through home visits and health and safety assessments to ensure that foster carers' homes are safe environments for children. However, unannounced visits have not always taken place in line with statutory guidance.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers are good. Assessment reports demonstrate the skills and experiences that applicants bring to fostering. Foster carers have a good understanding of their responsibilities to keep children safe.

The agency has comprehensive recruitment practices in place for staff and panel members. This ensures that only those adults who are safe to work with children do so.

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

The registered manager's post has been vacant since December 2022. A manager has been appointed and has applied for registration with Ofsted. Senior leaders have implemented plans to increase management arrangements and have recently appointed a new team manager to work alongside the manager.

The impact of instability in the registered manager role has been compounded by a high turnover of supervising social workers. Of the four social workers employed by the agency, three have commenced their employment this year. Staff receive regular, good-quality supervision. They said that they feel supported by leaders and managers. However, the newly qualified social worker who has recently joined the agency is not being provided with an appropriate level of additional support during her first year in practice.

Foster carers remain very committed to the agency but the changes in staffing have impacted on the experiences of some foster carers. At times, some foster carers have not had an allocated supervising social worker, which has left them feeling

vulnerable. This has also been raised as a concern by placing authorities and is something that leaders and managers are continuing to address.

Foster carers receive good-quality supervision. The supervision template is detailed and guides staff and foster carers to ensure that all areas of practice are discussed. However, written supervision records are not always made available to foster carers within acceptable timescales. Carers have access to a range of training opportunities but are not always able to access training in a timely manner. Newly approved foster carers are supported to complete the required training within their first year of approval.

Shortfalls in management oversight mean that the quality of care children receive and the progress they make are not robustly captured by the agency. Leaders and managers have not maintained accurate records of when children leave their foster families in an unplanned way. This reduces opportunities to evaluate how effective the agency has been in meeting children's needs. The recommendation made at the last inspection in respect of leaders and managers having effective procedures to assess and evaluate the progress children make from the start of their placement has not been met.

The monitoring of written records is not robust and opportunities to ensure that children's statutory information is provided by placing authorities have been missed.

The formal written review of the quality of care that is being completed quarterly has a strong focus on quantitative data. There is a lack of qualitative information that evidences children's achievements and experiences. These reports are not being sent to Ofsted in a timely way.

The functioning and effectiveness of panel are key strengths of the agency. The agency benefits from having an experienced and skilled chair and vice chair of panel. The agency decision-maker (ADM) is equally skilled and experienced. ADM decisions are thorough and provide a clear rationale for decision-making. The ADM makes phone contact with foster carers to share her decision-making and written information is clear.

The fostering panel and ADM are supported by good-quality independent review of foster carers' approvals from the independent reviewing officer. The administration of panel is highly effective and the chair reports that this helps him to ensure that panel runs smoothly. Foster carer annual reviews are completed within timescales and provide good support and challenge to the foster carers and the agency.

Leaders and managers are keen to develop a culture of learning within the organisation. The panel chair, ADM and fostering independent reviewing officer report that leaders and managers use the regular meetings that are now in place to listen to and learn from their views. This places the agency in a stronger position to move forward and make progress.

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 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>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.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3))</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that there are systems in place to monitor and evaluate the progress of children; that accurate records are kept of unplanned placement endings for children; that the review of the quality of care includes the views of children, foster parents and placing authorities; and that quality of care reports are provided to Ofsted in a timely manner.</p>	<p>29 February 2024</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.</p> <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</p>	<p>31 January 2024</p>

plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (3))

In particular, the registered person must ensure that foster carers receive identified training to meet children's needs and receive written records of foster carer supervision, in a timely manner. In addition, ensure that children's statutory plans and assessments are received from the placing authority and are available to foster carers and children.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that unannounced visits to foster carers are completed within timescales and in line with the agreed policy of the agency. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children's care records clearly record one-to-one work that has been completed with children to help them understand their life history, and that foster carer records about the child are detailed and helpful to the child. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that newly qualified social workers receive additional supervision and training in their first year of employment. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 24.1)

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: SC059742

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Inspectors

Dawn Parton, Social Care Inspector

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