

# Match Foster Care

Match Foster Care Limited

Severn House, 30-32 Ombersley Street West, Droitwich, Worcestershire WR9 8QZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Match Foster Care is a private limited company operating as an independent fostering agency. The agency was registered in 2012. The registration consists of two offices. The first is located in Droitwich. Since 2017, the agency has also operated a second office in Stoke-on-Trent. This second office provides services to foster carers living in the Stoke area under the same registration.

The fostering agency provides a range of placements, including emergency, respite, short and long term, unaccompanied children and young people and young adults 'staying put'. At the time of the inspection, there were 84 children living in 50 fostering households.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2017. She holds a suitable management qualification.

**Inspection dates:** 4 to 8 March 2019

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>Good</b>
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:** 23 November 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children make progress in all aspects of their life because of the good-quality care that they receive.
- Passionate and enthusiastic senior managers lead a positive, committed workforce that is focused on achieving good outcomes for children.
- Children feel part of their foster family.
- Managers have developed specialist roles in the agency that support foster carers to meet the health and education needs of children.
- The agency provides regular and varied opportunities for individuals and groups of children and foster carers to socialise, supporting the development of close networks.
- The agency is well resourced with staff and low caseloads ensure that supervising social workers have time to build positive relationships with foster carers and children.
- The children's panel ensures that children are involved in decision-making.
- Incidents of children going missing are low.
- Individual work with children has supported them to understand how to keep themselves safe.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- There is a lack of training for staff regarding their roles and responsibilities when managing contact. This, coupled with an absence of risk assessments in this area, places children and staff at potential risk of harm.
- Managers have not ensured that staff and panel members are safely recruited.
- The agency does not demonstrate that children are involved in agreeing the plans that impact on their day-to-day care.
- Risk assessments do not clearly identify or explain decisions that have been made.
- Supervising social workers have not received training to support their understanding of the specialist role of supervising foster carers.
- The registered manager has relied on self-reported information when investigating a complaint about staff practice.
- The panel does not receive feedback about the experiences of the people who attend these meetings. This restricts the ability of the panel to improve and develop.

## 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 registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and 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, 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 is in relation to:</p> <p>Ensuring that, when staff and/or foster carers are involved in the contact arrangements for children, these arrangements are suitably risk assessed and the staff and/or foster carers have received training to prepare them for the task.</p> <p>Ensuring that children’s risk assessments clearly document the assessment process and decision-making in relation to risk increases or reduction.</p> <p>Ensuring that any complaints received by the agency are investigated fully, giving due regard to the views of the complainant and any other relevant parties in the process.</p>	31/05/2019
<p>The fostering service must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(a)(3))</p>	05/04/2019

## Recommendations

- Children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 8, paragraph 1.3)

This is in relation to children being involved in, and understanding, the plans that are in place for them to enable foster carers and children to manage risk safely.

- There is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 47, paragraph 23.1)

- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 50, paragraph 25.1)

This is in relation to ensuring that the fostering panel receives regular feedback from those who attend, that is used to inform and develop practice.

## Inspection judgements

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

Children and young people make good progress in all aspects of their life. Children build positive, trusting relationships with their foster carers and feel part of their foster family. A young person told an inspector, 'They [foster carers] are really supportive. I have had rubbish experiences and to have a home where I can have my friends round, relax and just be me is amazing.'

Children are supported to achieve educationally. Managers have recently created two education support roles within the agency. These staff work with foster carers, attending education meetings, managing school admissions and providing additional support to children when this need is identified. For example, education support workers provided revision sessions for young people before exams. In addition, these staff are implementing systems that will monitor the educational progress of children placed with the agency.

The agency employs a registered nurse who works with foster carers to oversee children's health needs. This can include completion of annual health assessments for children who are placed away from their home local authority. Foster carers value this additional, specialist input which enables them to ensure that children's health needs are understood and met.

Managers promote shared activities for children and foster carers. Foster carers and children are offered a range of regular and varied opportunities for individuals and groups. This supports the development of close relationships between foster carers and children, and supports supervising social workers and staff to build positive relationships with children and foster carers. A particular highlight is the annual ball, which brings all staff, foster carers and children together in a truly elaborate and aspirational event that ensures that everyone in the agency feels valued.

Managers are keen to include children in the development of the agency. The children's panel is a forum through which children are involved in decision-making. The panel is involved in interviewing potential staff and foster carers. One young person told the inspector, 'If we don't like them, they don't come.' This group has also been involved in drawing up the children's charter and facilitates part of the preparation training for new applicants. This level of inclusion ensures that children see that they have a valuable role in the agency. A foster carer said, 'The agency puts children before everything else. It has children at its heart.'

The agency is developing its service for young people who are leaving care. This includes a new programme of sessions that help young people to develop the skills and knowledge that they will require in adulthood. At the time of the inspection, the agency had one young person 'staying put' with their foster carers. Managers ensure that they retain links with young adults who have left the service and ensure that these young adults continue to be included in events, enabling them to retain positive support links while living independently.

Children receive information about the agency and their foster carers before they move into their foster home through accessible children's guides and family books.

Foster carers maintain memory boxes while children live with them, providing children with an understanding of their history.

The agency is committed to supporting children to stay in touch with the people that are important to them, with staff or foster carers providing supervision of these arrangements when needed. However, managers have failed to ensure that all staff or foster carers involved in these arrangements have received training to fully understand their roles and responsibilities in this area. In addition, managers have not ensured that these arrangements are suitably risk assessed. This lack of oversight has the potential to place children and staff at risk of harm.

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

Staff and foster carers receive regular training that keeps them up to date with current safeguarding developments. For example, staff and foster carers have recently received training regarding county lines and identifying the criminal exploitation of children.

Incidents of children going missing from home are low. When a child is known to be at risk of going missing, supervising social workers ensure that foster carers are clear about how they should respond.

When foster carers are subject to allegations or concerns, managers act quickly to report these to the designated officer. The registered manager has developed a positive working relationship with the local designated officer and uses this to seek advice and guidance.

Managers ensure that children live in safe foster homes. Annual health and safety inspections and a minimum of one unannounced visit to the foster home each year help to keep children safe.

Supervising social workers support foster carers to implement a range of risk management and safe care plans. These plans identify risks for children and detail how these can be managed. However, there is a lack of clear recording when risks have been assessed to have changed. This means that supervising social workers cannot evidence when risks have been managed or how decisions to reduce risk levels have been reached.

Support workers have completed some effective individual work with children that has increased children's ability to keep themselves safe. However, consultation with children is not evident in risk management processes. For example, there is a significant absence of the child's voice in safe care plans or risk management strategies that inform their day-to-day care. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that children understand the care that they receive.

The registered manager has identified a shortfall in the safe recruitment of staff and panel members. Specifically, the reasons why individuals left previous positions with children and vulnerable adults is not always verified. The registered manager has implemented new processes to ensure that the agency now meets this regulatory requirement. However, progress in completing these checks retrospectively is slow. In addition, a current member of staff was placed in a position that required individual work with children without this check being made. The registered manager

addressed this during the inspection.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The senior management team is extremely passionate and enthusiastic about the children, the foster carers and the potential that they have to achieve progress. This results in a positive, committed workforce that is focused on achieving good outcomes for children.

The agency is well resourced with staff and managers, ensuring that social workers have very low caseloads. Consequently, social workers have time to build positive relationships with foster carers and children. Foster carers are overwhelmingly complimentary about all aspects of the service that they receive from the agency. A foster carer wrote, 'Having the support of Match managers and all the staff has enabled me to excel within my role.'

Foster carers who have experienced particularly challenging times have found the agency responsive to their needs. One foster carer told the inspector, 'I have been at breaking point and they have been there all the way. I feel that knowing you have someone that has got your back is important.'

Staff feel that they are valued by the organisation. They told inspectors that all levels of management are available to them and that their suggestions for development are heard and acted on.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision that allows them time to reflect on their practice and to consider their individual development. This is supported by a range of group meetings that review agency practice and ensure that staff are aware of current themes or difficulties facing foster carers. Supervising social workers have access to a range of training that is aimed at supporting them in their role. However, supervising social workers have not had the opportunity to undertake training in providing supervision to foster carers. This leaves supervising social workers without some of the essential knowledge and skills to support their specialist role.

Foster carers have access to comprehensive training that reflects the range of issues that they are presented with. Managers have ensured that training is available in a range of formats and locations to enable foster carers to make full use of the opportunities. Increasing foster carers' skills and understanding supports placement stability. A foster carer told the inspector, 'One training session that I have found to be particularly useful was attachment. It has changed the way that I respond to the children, which in turn has helped them to attain a more secure attachment.'

New applicants report that their enquiry to the agency was received positively, and newly approved foster carers found the assessment process informative. This left them feeling well prepared for the fostering task.

The agency panel is made up of members with a diverse range of experiences. Panel holds a quality assurance function and has been influential in achieving improvements in agency practice. For example, panel feedback has resulted in changes to how information is provided for foster carers' reviews, ensuring that previously identified themes are not overlooked. However, there is no reciprocal

quality assurance arrangement of the panel. This is a missed opportunity to reflect on and develop this element of the service.

Supervising social workers build positive professional networks, and communication with others is a strength. A social worker told inspectors, 'I've always found their workers to be professional, helpful and supportive of children, carers and other professionals.'

There has been one complaint made to the agency since the last inspection. The registered manager has not ensured that this has been investigated with sufficient rigour; rather, there was an overreliance on self-reporting. This fails to demonstrate open and transparent practice.

The decision by managers to open an office in Stoke has enabled the agency to provide local support and training for foster carers living in that area. The number of foster carers supported by this office has grown significantly and, as a result, the agency has begun to make plans to register this as a separate service in the future.

The registered manager has accepted the shortfalls and areas for development identified during this inspection and has been quick to respond. The registered manager has a clear development plan that recognises the strengths of the service. Senior managers are keen for the agency to be involved in new and emerging projects to enhance the service that they provide. For example, the agency has been part of an initiative to recruit foster carers who have disabilities and have undertaken adaptations of their office to facilitate this.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC442843

**Registered provider:** Match Foster Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** Severn House, 30-32 Ombersley Street West,  
Droitwich, Worcestershire WR9 8QZ

**Responsible individual:** Carrie Marsh

**Registered manager:** Jacqueline Dunster

**Telephone number:** 01905 770500

**Email address:** jacqueline@matchfostercare.co.uk

## **Inspectors**

Tracey Coglan Greig, social care inspector  
Lisa Walsh, 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](mailto: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

<http://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](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2019