

Fairways Care UK

Fairways Care (UK) Limited

Fair Ways, Ground Floor, Building 1000, Western Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO6 3EZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fairways Care (UK) Ltd Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency based in Southampton. It is a part of the Fairways (UK) Ltd group that provides residential placements. At the time of this inspection, the agency provided support and supervision to 43 approved foster care households and 42 children in care. The provider states in the agency's statement of purpose its mission is to make a difference to children through passionate care, support and education. The agency provides a range of fostering households for children, including short-term and long-term homes and a small number of specialist provisions, including 'staying put', unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and parent and child homes.

The registered manager has been in post since July 2019.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 1 to 4 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 20 November 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The leaders and managers inspire innovative practice that empowers the children to talk about issues and decisions that affect them, learn new skills, have fun and develop a positive sense of their identity. As a result, the children's voices are listened to and heard by the agency staff and foster carers.

Children's participation is active and influential. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff and the children together set up the 'Lowdown' podcast, a ground-breaking forum for the children to tell their story, in whatever way they wish. This has provided the children with a means to express their stories on their terms. For one child, this involved him sharing his podcast at a child protection meeting. Consequently, the children learn to recognise that they can have a positive impact and influence on the people and the environment around them.

Children and foster carers have access to specialist help from the in-house therapeutic hub. This service offers emotional support to the children who do not meet the child and adolescent mental health services criteria or are facing long waiting lists. This means that the children's emotional needs can be quickly identified and they are provided with support.

When first joining a fostering family, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are referred directly to the therapy hub and are offered emotional support with the use of interpreters. Access to individual therapy for the children gives them understanding and tools to help them heal and build on their resilience for their future success.

The progress of unaccompanied children is exceptional from their starting points. For example, an unaccompanied child who to start with barely spoke English is now attending college and working with the Home Office on a project to help improve the processing arrangements for other unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Every effort is made to match unaccompanied children with foster carers who meet the children's cultural needs and to ensure that they have access to a wide range of support.

Children benefit from access to an online training programme. This training is designed specifically for children and offers several life skills courses in preparation for adulthood. The leaders, staff and carers strive to make sure the children have opportunities to achieve their dreams.

The high quality of care that the foster carers provide to the children improves their life chances. Foster carers and the staff celebrate the children's successes no matter how big or small. Many children are active within their schools and take part in community projects. Several young people have moved on from 'staying put' arrangements to study at university.

The agency encourages the foster carers from the start of their fostering journey to build lasting relationships with the children. Many children remain in contact and connected with their fostering family and with the agency after they leave. One young person remained with his fostering family beyond a 'staying put' arrangement. Following an apprenticeship with the agency, he is now training at university to become a social worker. The leaders and the staff's enduring focus on relationships increases the children's sense of permanence and ability to form and sustain positive relationships.

The registered manager and the supervising social workers consider in depth how the foster carers can meet a new child's needs before their arrival. However, some matching documents do not contain the views of the existing children in the family, and/or sufficient information about the possible impact. This lack of information has the potential to hinder the foster carer's ability to provide a safe environment for everyone in the fostering household.

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

The staff's dedication and commitment to safeguarding are exemplary. A strong safeguarding focus comes from the top and is central to the staff practice. Managers, supervising social workers and foster carers take timely and proactive actions to identify potential harm, protect children and prevent harm from reoccurring. There are close links with the various local authorities involved to ensure that there is good coordination of interventions and sharing of information. Consequently, there is a strong safeguarding culture and a determination to keep the children as safe as possible.

Strong safeguarding reporting processes, regular staff team meetings and reflective practice support learning and development. When concerns are raised or become known, staff use lessons learned to further improve safeguarding practice. Standards of care investigations are handled quickly and shared with relevant safeguarding agencies. Sensitive but honest challenge is provided to the foster carers, ensuring the focus remains on the children's safety and on the required standards of care that the children receive.

The agency panel chair and fostering panel members provide strong safeguarding oversight and quality assurance to the agency. They provide sensible and developmental feedback about the quality of assessments. Thorough scrutiny by the panel and the agency decision-maker means that foster carers are only approved if they have the necessary skills, values and experience to provide safe and caring homes for the children. The children's panel members provide important child-focused insight and perspective on the recruitment of new foster carers. The agency chair said that the agency is 'ambitious to get it right'.

Help and support are readily available for the foster carers when they need it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, supervising social workers used online forums effectively to

continue with consistent levels of contact and support for the foster carers and the children. When there were concerns or additional support was required, face-to-face visiting took place in line with the government guidance at the time. Feedback from foster carers was unanimous in their praise of the agency and their supervising social workers. One foster carer described the support as 'second to none'. The high level of support and care ensures that the foster carers receive effective support. As a result, the foster carers develop confidence and skills to manage difficulties when they arise.

The results of the agency's investment into children's participation are outstanding and worthy of wider dissemination in the social care sector. The 'Friday night' virtual project hosted during the COVID-19 pandemic is a great example of how the staff helped create a sense of fun, belonging, and community during a difficult period for many. Children hosted games, well-being activities and quizzes. This was an online stage for all, to sing, play music, share artwork and tell jokes. Children took ownership of running the show and this significantly increased the level of commitment and engagement.

The agency encourages a peer buddy system and provides regular support groups, alongside a smaller group for male foster carers. Foster carers are encouraged to take care of themselves and learn to know the signs of when they need extra support or rest. This approach cascades down to the children who are encouraged to talk through problems or difficult feelings and seek help when they need it.

Supervising social workers are highly skilled at building meaningful relationships with the children. They meet with the children separately from their foster carers each month. This is often out of the home, for instance, for a walk or visit to a local cafe. The trusted relationships that the children develop, along with unannounced visits, serve as an added protective factor in helping the children to feel confident to share any worries they may have.

In practice, children who go missing from home experience well-coordinated responses that reduce the risk of harm for them. However, guidance to the foster carers is not sufficiently clear on roles and responsibilities. Local authority independent return home interviews have not been reliably undertaken. As a result, important understanding and information around risks may be missed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers display a tenacious drive to improve and develop how they support the children to achieve and ensure high standards of care. A positive energy and a strengths-based culture of high aspirations run through this agency. All staff, including administrators, human resources, finance, information technology and marketing, have one aim, to make a difference in the children's lives.

Senior managers and directors are visible and approachable, and they listen. Reporting includes not only compliance and management of risk but the opportunity

to share the success stories of the children. This approach is also reflected in the quality of care reviews.

The agency is well staffed and supervising social workers hold manageable caseloads to ensure the best possible all-around support is provided to the children and the foster carers. Recruitment is of the highest standards. All relevant information is joined up to provide a complete picture of applicants.

Leaders and managers actively monitor the quality of care that children receive. Supervising social workers and managers complete placement ending reviews when any child leaves a fostering family. Staff recognise that it is important to identify what has worked well, alongside identifying areas of development to inform new learning and future planning.

Leaders and managers have embraced the push from children to use less professional jargon in written documents. Children have taken the lead in redesigning feedback templates and improving the language used. The leaders and the staff are actively supporting a whole agency shift, in collaboration with children, to move away from the use of language that stigmatises children in care.

There is wide-ranging and relevant training available for foster carers. The oversight of training is carefully tracked by the training team and the completion of training and attendance is excellent.

Research-informed practice is evident in the training programme. The programme equips the foster carers and the staff well to meet the needs of the children and to provide safe care.

Foster carers' supervision visits are regular, child focused and refer to the foster carers' training needs. However, the records do not reflect trauma- and attachment-informed parenting or include exploration with the foster carers of training undertaken. This is a missed opportunity to build on the foster carers' understanding of how therapeutic parenting can benefit the lives of the children.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that their guidance is clear, so that foster carers know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority's policy is in relation to children going missing. This includes ensuring that children are offered an independent return home interview. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.2)
- The registered person should only suggest 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. The information should be provided in a clear written form and include the support that will be available to the foster carer, if required. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive the support and supervision they need in order to provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs. In particular, that supervision records reflect an exploration of how the carers training and/or new learning informs their parenting of the children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.1)

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: SC038930

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