

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy Limited
Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 2SJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Fitzgerald Fostering and Consultancy Limited is owned and managed by the responsible individual and the registered manager, and operates from a serviced office complex in Bracknell.

The agency provides a range of foster placements on an emergency, short-break, short-term or longer-term basis, for children and young people from 0 to 18 years old.

At the time of this visit, there were 22 active fostering households with 23 children in placement.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 February 2018

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 **outstanding**

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: 15 September 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- The children and young people live in safe and stable placements in which they make excellent progress, due to being matched with the right foster carers, with whom they develop positive relationships.
- Foster carers and staff are extremely professional and committed to the children and young people. Children and young people thrive and achieve excellent outcomes.
- The views and voices of children and young people, including those who are non-verbal, are heard by their carers and agency staff.
- The level of support provided by the agency for the foster carers is exceptional. This helps them to provide a high standard of care for children.
- All the children and young people are in full-time education and many are achieving well there. Health needs are given high priority, especially those of a complex nature.
- Foster carers have, where appropriate, engaged with the parents of children and young people, who, in turn, are highly supportive of these placements.
- The children and young people are kept extremely safe by their carers. They rarely go missing and carers understand the range of risks that they must mitigate.
- Members of the leadership and management team are strong, passionate about the work and have a clear understanding of the needs of the children and young people.
- Highly skilled independent social workers monitor placements within the agency. They bring a vast amount of knowledge to their role as a result of their experience.
- The managers are sensible about the future plans for the agency, limiting its growth to maintain the family atmosphere. Comprehensive quarterly reporting successfully identifies the trends and patterns of the agency.
- There were no requirements and recommendations made as a result of the inspection.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people live in safe environments and make significant progress in their development, health, education and family relationships. Placements are extremely stable and very well supported and very few unplanned endings occur. The children and young people speak very highly of their experiences with the agency and their carers. Some notable comments by children and young people were:

- 'My foster carers have trusted me, they helped me care about myself.'
- 'We always do activities. My foster carers taught me to be more open with people and helped me realise what is right and wrong.'
- 'I like the way they include me as part of the family and introduce me to their friends. They encourage me to be part of the community and volunteer for charity.'
- 'I get so much, it makes me a better person.'

Detailed and careful matching, and pre-placement and placement meetings between children and young people and their foster carers ensure that they live with carers who can meet their needs. Children and young people settle quickly and both they and their carers receive the right support from the start of the placements.

The agency has successfully recruited foster carers who are committed and highly professional. Many have raised children of their own or have professional experience of working with children and families. The carers are able to enhance the experiences of the children and young people by having ample knowledge of policies, procedures and the support packages available. All carers spoken with during the inspection displayed an exceptional insight into the children and young people in their care, talking through their achievements, needs and potential difficulties.

The children and young people build trusting, secure relationships with their carers, and are treated with respect. The children and young people develop positive relationships with the carers' children and other relatives. The children and young people have a voice in their placements.

The views of children and young people, including those who are non-verbal, are routinely sought and are documented in their records. One carer was observed to have a clear understanding of the gestures and sounds their foster child uses to convey their needs and wants.

The health needs of the children and young people are given high priority, resulting in many experiencing good health. Some children and young people with complex

medical needs have experienced improved health due to their carers supporting them to attend routine specialist appointments, often on a weekly basis. Foster carers routinely document and monitor children and young people's medication, in line with the agency's guidance. A young person has shown remarkable accomplishments as a result of their foster carer's efforts, such as improvements in their communication, speech and diet.

Education is valued and promoted by the agency. All children and young people attend mainstream or alternative educational provisions, and have excellent attendance. The agency has provided a workshop for foster carers to enhance their understanding of their children and young people's educational needs. The workshop has increased carers' confidence in engaging with schools and other educational provisions. Foster carers actively support children and young people by taking them to school and maintaining daily logs, which are shared between teachers and carers. One young person has made exceptional progress, moving from not engaging in school to going to university.

The agency provides exceptional support for foster carers to assist them in their care of the children and young people. Carers receive training, monthly supervision and home visits, along with practice-development sessions that offer therapeutic input in a group setting on a monthly basis. The group is very well attended, as it allows carers to talk through their feelings and placement difficulties, and develop their practice.

Carers promote good relationships and work well with children and young people's parents. Foster carers provide parents with monthly updates when it is appropriate to do so, and are able to maintain boundaries with parents while supporting contact arrangements. This practice has allowed parents to trust foster carers; for example, one parent shared concerning information with a carer, allowing for swift intervention and placement stabilisation for a young person.

The children and young people participate in age-appropriate activities that develop their social skills and ability to engage with others, such as attending youth clubs and cadets. They develop a sense of social awareness and community by volunteering for charity organisations. Children and young people take annual holidays with their foster carers, which supports their sense of belonging to their foster families.

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

The responsible person is the safeguarding lead for the agency, and has successfully established a culture that ensures that children and young people are consistently kept safe. The policies and procedures of the agency developed by the managers offer detailed guidance on actions to take when dealing with child protection matters.

Safeguarding issues are few; the agency's managers have notified Ofsted of fewer

than five incidents in a three-year span, and have often discussed with their allocated inspectors those incidents that were not reported and why. The local authority officer has raised no concerns about the safeguarding practice of the agency.

The risk assessments and safer care plans are individualised and extremely detailed, covering all known risks associated with the children and young people. The documents are constructed by staff, carers and managers, based on their knowledge of the children and young people. The staff consistently review documentation with carers to identify any changes that are needed regarding the behaviours of the children and young people.

The staff and foster carers are not complacent when children and young people appear to be settled and are not displaying concerning behaviours. Forward thinking is utilised to anticipate and develop strategies for preventing behaviour that could potentially cause a placement disruption. With the support of the staff, foster carers are able to maintain placements so that they can provide children and young people with planned endings, even in difficult situations. A new foster carer spoke about the support she had received from both the agency and other foster carers, which allowed her to support a young person fully until they were moved elsewhere.

Missing-from-care incidents are not an issue for the children and young people, as shown by the small number of incidents on file. There have been fewer than 10 incidents since the last inspection. These were managed extremely well by carers and the staff, resulting in children and young people returning to their placements safe, and quickly.

The agency has had no reports of physical interventions involving the children and young people. This reflects the carers' ability to successfully manage and de-escalate negative behaviours. The agency's monitoring of these events has met the requirement from the last inspection.

The children and young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation develop insight into their risks and behaviours. The foster carers have great understanding of the impact that child sexual exploitation has on the children and young people, while being patient and calm in their approach when children and young people appear guarded. The children and young people eventually develop the confidence to talk about their histories and learn to keep themselves safe.

The foster carers and staff are well trained in safeguarding and remain updated on trends and patterns that place children and young people at risk. A wide range of training courses are provided on topics relating to radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and e-safety, to name a few. Foster carers take pride in their ability to keep young people safe and value the training sessions. This is evident from the fact that foster carers are looking forward to attending the upcoming Saturday safeguarding training class provided by the agency.

Thorough assessments of foster carers' skills are conducted and robust risk assessments are carried out. These ensure that the welfare of children and young

people is promoted. All staff, including those who do not work directly with the children and young people, such as the panel members, are employed through safe recruitment practices. Prior to being appointed, the successful candidates have their background information scrutinised and verified. The children and young people benefit from the agency employing individuals who are of good character and who will act in their best interests'.

Supervising social workers undertake regular visits to foster carers and see children and young people on their visits. They develop meaningful relationships with children and young people, while providing an additional person they can talk to if they wish. Unannounced visits to carers' homes are undertaken twice a year and health and safety risk assessments are regularly reviewed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed effectively to a high level by the responsible person and the registered manager. There is a clear and robust management structure in place. Commissioners consider the placements offered by the agency to be outstanding. The carers and the staff appreciate the manager's calm disposition and the effective leadership that is always available to them 24 hours a day.

There is good communication between the agency staff and foster carers, with regular conversations held about the children and young people's needs. This promotes consistency in practice throughout the agency. The foster carers and staff feel that they are part of a professional family that forms an effective team around children and young people.

The growth of the agency has been monitored and regulated by the managers, allowing them to maintain the family atmosphere and ensuring that they have good knowledge and understanding of children and young people's needs, and carers' skills and abilities. The manager's overview has directly assisted in the children and young people having stable placements, resulting in some returning home to their parents, or going on to lead fully independent lives with children of their own.

The managers actively seek out the views of the children, young people, foster carers, professionals and the staff, and incorporate them into the service. Rather than rely on traditional surveys, they have recruited a professional who is independent of the agency to engage directly with the children and young people, which ensures that their views are well understood. The managers commissioned an independent social worker to produce a report based on the views of the carers. The foster carers' opinions of the agency and changes they would like to occur were obtained during private telephone conversations.

There is evidence that foster carers and staff respectfully challenge each other and professionals on behalf of the children and young people. Children and young people's daily lives have improved quickly as a result of this practice. The agency is quick to implement supportive services for children and young people when there are delays due to awaiting funding approvals. The staff consider the sourcing of

support for children and young people to be a major strength of the agency.

The highly experienced independent social workers that monitor the placements are true assets to the agency. Some are former managers of child and family services, and are dedicated to the agency's ethos of promoting good outcomes for the children and young people. They take appropriate steps to continue to develop their practice through training and incorporating the latest research into their practice. Supervising social workers were able to provide a thorough overview of all placements within the agency. Foster carers are very complimentary about the professionalism, support and guidance provided by the supervising social workers.

There are currently six foster carers with no children or young people placed in their care. The foster carers remain motivated and attached to the agency by providing respite care for other carers, and attending training and support groups. In addition, they receive monthly supervision and visits from their supervising social workers. The managers acknowledge that some foster carers can be impacted financially by not having children and young people in their care, and offer financial support if needed.

The panel is an effective and valuable resource of the agency. An experienced chair leads a panel that is committed to safe and reliable placements. Informed recommendations are made by the panel, based on information regarding potential carers that is gathered by independent social workers. The assessments are comprehensive, easy to read and submitted in a timely manner. The views of children and young people are obtained for all reviews. The agency's decision-maker has never had a reason to disagree with the panel, and informs applicants of decisions in a timely manner.

The strengths and weaknesses of the agency are well known to the managers, as is evident in their comprehensive quarterly reports. These reports provide insight into how managers improve, develop and monitor the agency by responding to shortcomings that have been identified by children, young people, foster carers and the staff. The agency's practice is reflective, and takes into account any changes to legislation, good practice guidance and up-to-date research. This is reflected in the fostering agency's website and the systems in place.

The statement of purpose for the agency provides clear insight into the aims and objectives of the agency in a short, precise document. The managers ensure that the agency is working in line with its ethos, and update the statement of purpose as needed. The age-appropriate guides provided for the children and young people have been condensed in response to their views that it was too comprehensive.

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: SC383749

Registered provider: Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy Limited

Registered provider address: Lily Hill House, Lily Hill Road, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 2SJ

Responsible individual: James Townend

Registered manager: Lesley Fitzgerald

Telephone number: 01753 550 031

Email address: lesley@fitzgeraldfostering.com

Inspector

James Harmon: 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.

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.

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
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018