

# Integrated Services Programme

Integrated Services Programme

9 Church Street, Chesham, Buckinghamshire HP5 1HS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency. The fostering service registered with Ofsted in September 2017 to become a separately registered branch of the Integrated Services Programme company.

The company is a part of a much larger organisation, Polaris Community, comprising of several independent fostering agencies.

There are three offices connected to the registered office in Chesham, located in Milton Keynes, Wisbech and Bromsgrove.

Foster carers provide long-term, short-term, respite and permanent care placements. The fostering service also provides placements to disabled children as well as parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 90 approved fostering households caring for 124 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in July 2019.

### Inspection dates: 13 to 17 February 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 **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 1 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

This agency has a strong therapeutic ethos that places relationship-based care at its heart. There is an impressive rate of long-term stability for children, and many children live together with their brothers or sisters. One child described her experience of care as 'a place to be safe, and with people who care and love you'.

Children benefit from living in nurturing family homes with foster carers who provide them with structure, routine and consistency. The children have opportunities to try new things and take part in a variety of activities suited to their interests and hobbies. As a result, the children increase their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The agency supports and advocates for its foster carers to provide parenting from an attachment-informed model of care. Foster carers and children have access to in-house therapeutic services. As a result, the children's emotional needs can be quickly identified, and they are provided with support.

There is a strong drive throughout the agency to improve education outcomes for the children. The agency's education advisory teachers provide effective support and advice to foster carers and other professionals. This helps ensure that the children have the right resources and support in place to help them achieve.

Children are regularly encouraged to express their views and wishes on how they are being cared for in a variety of ways. This includes creative ways of seeking the children's views about short-break stays. Consequently, the children learn that they have influence and that their opinions are valued.

New children are welcomed into families with a personalised welcome box, and the foster carers' birth children receive a similarly personalised 'hello' box. These small touches provided by the agency help set the foundation for the children to feel welcomed, and they begin to build trust with their new families.

Staff and foster carers are proactive in supporting children to keep in touch with people who are important to them. This child-centred approach enables the children to maintain important relationships with their families and enhances the children's exploration and growing sense of their identity and culture.

Prospective foster carers feel valued and welcomed by the agency. The process for assessment is timely and sensitive to the needs of the carers. Assessment reports submitted to the panel are of very good quality. Those who go on to foster feel well prepared by the application process and the training that is provided.

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

Foster carers benefit from professional and supportive relationships with the agency's staff, which helps them to provide high-quality and safe care.

Children enjoy regular contact with their foster carer's supervising social workers and the fostering advisors, who periodically see the children alone. Supervision visits, along with unannounced visits to the foster carers' home, ensure that the children have regular opportunities to speak to known professionals and share any worries that they may have.

The positive relationships that children have with their foster carers and other trusted adults are a strong protective factor in reducing risk for the children.

A good range of relevant training is available for foster carers, alongside regular supervision visits and support groups. This helps the foster carers to develop confidence in themselves and resilience when dealing with difficult situations and managing risks.

Risk assessments and safe care plans support and guide the foster carers to safely meet the needs of the children in their care. The agency operates an effective out-of-hours service. Foster carers report that they can obtain help and support at any time of day or night.

There is a careful selection of fostering households. Rigorous assessments and panel processes ensure that foster carers are approved only if they have the necessary skills and experience to provide safe, caring homes to children.

Agency staff are confident of their role in protecting children. However, a shortfall was found in the agency's failure to notify Ofsted about an allegation on two occasions. This hinders the regulator's ability to monitor the service.

Some children's records did not contain their up-to-date local authority care plans, placement plans and health reviews. Consequently, their foster carers are not provided with the important documents that they need to inform the care of their children. However, in practice, the foster carers and supervising social workers have a good understanding of the needs of the children. In addition, the administration staff have good systems in place to chase up and escalate concerns about missing documentation with local authorities.

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

The agency is managed by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. She is well supported by her managers, alongside an accessible senior leadership team. Leaders and the staff are compassionate, curious and committed to understanding the experiences of the children that they work with and making a positive difference in their lives.

Foster carers were unanimous in their praise of the agency and the range of support offered to them. There is a low turnover of supervising social workers, strong staff morale and reasonable caseloads. This ensures that the supervising social workers can provide consistent and timely support to the foster carers.

The panel is competently led and provides a high level of professional inquisitiveness and scrutiny during the foster carer's approval and review process. Clear recommendations and reasons for the recommendations are documented, and there is evidence that safe and suitable decisions are made by the panel.

Managers hold high expectations that foster carers complete training within the required time frames. The registered manager's strong oversight of the training needs of foster carers and the staff helps ensure that the foster carers are well equipped with the skills and knowledge to safely care for the children.

Managers ensure that safer recruitment processes are in place so that only appropriately vetted staff are employed to work with children. Complaints and allegations are fully investigated. Any lessons learned are used to improve practice.

Management monitoring takes place through a system of thorough and well-established audits and quality assurance processes. However, the registered manager has failed to maintain the fire, health and safety arrangements in the workplace. This demonstrates a lack of due care to staff, children and visitors to the agency. The registered manager took immediate action to rectify this during the inspection.

## 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—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>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 particularly refers to ensuring that management monitoring systems are in place and effective to ensure the health and safety of the registered offices of the fostering agency.</p>	<p>1 April 2023</p>

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure all foster carers and fostering service staff understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions that a person may have behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child. This includes the duty to refer information to Ofsted. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 22.1)
- The registered person must ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information about a child's circumstances and health needs, specifically when children are new to fostering families. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)

## **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:** SC067361

**Registered provider:** Integrated Services Programme

**Registered provider address:** Aureole House, 9 Church Street, Chesham, Bucks HP5 1HS

**Responsible individual:** Joanne Savage

**Registered manager:** Jane Partridge

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## **Inspectors**

Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector  
Skye Frain, Social Care Inspector

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