

ISP Teynham

ISP Castlewood Farm, Conyer Road, Teynham, Sittingbourne ME9 9EA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

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

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

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 55 approved fostering households, caring for 77 children.

Inspection dates: 30 July to 3 August 2018

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: n/a

Overall judgement at last inspection: n/a

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The service provides a good quality of care, and the outcomes for children are extremely positive. Children thrive and make excellent progress while living with their foster families.
- The fostering service maintains stable and successful foster-care placements. Children develop a strong sense of security and belonging.
- Children receive personalised care that meets their needs.
- Children are safe from harm, abuse and neglect.
- The protection of children is central to the work of the fostering service. There are effective systems in place to ensure that children are safe.
- Children benefit significantly from the attention paid by the fostering service to their emotional and psychological well-being.
- Older children are supported to develop good practical skills as they prepare for adulthood. 'Staying put' arrangements are appropriate and successful.
- Managers, staff and foster carers work effectively with other professionals to ensure the protection of children and to promote their well-being.
- Children's learning outcomes are positive, and children live healthy lifestyles.
- The work of the fostering advisors, in particular, promotes young people's personal safety, social interaction, increased self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Foster carers receive excellent support and supervision.
- Foster carers are valued members of the team, and contribute well to the planning and decision-making in relation to children's and young people's care planning.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development :

- There is no manager in post.
- Monitoring systems are inconsistent and ineffective. They do not provide managers with good oversight of the fostering service's operation to help to drive improvement.
- Some foster carers do not consistently attend training, and some do not have personal developments plans.
- Staff appraisals and some staff inductions are of poor quality.
- Foster carers require support to help children manage issues of discrimination.
- There are few opportunities for staff professional development.
- Foster carers do not consistently record children's information on the agency's electronic systems.
- The agency's central list does not include an individual with expertise in child

physical health.

- The agency's children's guide is not available in differing modes of communication. This is to promote children's access to key information about the service.

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
The registered provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency. (Regulation 6(1))	01/10/2018
The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 1a)(b))	01/11/2018
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. (Regulation 17(1))	01/11/2018
The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them— receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and are enabled from to time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 21(4)(a)(b))	01/11/2018
The fostering provider must— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the children’s guide. (Regulation 4(a)) In particular, this is to ensure that key information is available to children in communication formats that they can access.	01/11/2018

Recommendations

- 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. (National minimum standards (NMS) 25.1)
- Foster carers are supported to promote children’s social and emotional development, and to enable children develop emotional resilience. (NMS 2.1)

In particular, this is to develop children’s coping strategies in dealing with

discrimination.

- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. This includes updating risk assessments as required. (NMS 4.5)
- Staff complete at least one unannounced visit a year. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)
- Ensure that foster carers have personal development plans. These set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (NMS 20.5)
- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider. (NMS 14.8)

In particular, that the provider considers recruiting an individual with expertise in child physical health to the fostering panel.

- Ensure that foster carers understand the nature of records maintained, and ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 26.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit significantly from the service's focus on promoting effective relationships and ensuring that children have positive experiences. The welfare of children is central to the fostering service's work. As a result, children's experiences, progress and outcomes are excellent. However, shortfalls in the area of leadership and management have influenced the overall outcome of the inspection.

Children are introduced sensitively to their new foster families. Unplanned endings are rare. The fostering service's matching process is effective in ensuring that children's needs are well met. A local authority social worker said of a new placement, 'The foster carer for C is very committed and appears to have developed a good relationship with him. They are keen to do everything they can to support him.'

Children receive individualised care that is tailored to meet their specific needs. Foster carers work hard to develop nurturing relationships with children, and they are fully committed to making them feel loved and part of the family. Foster carers help children to reach their full potential. This is the case for the vast majority of children, including children with complex medical, behavioural and emotional needs. The service meets well the needs of children living with significant trauma and attachment disorders. A child said, 'I love my family. They helped me to come out of my shell, to be a real person. We're a proper family, its nurturing, there's no bickering. Just love.'

Children are supported to participate in their day-to-day care and more complex decisions about their lives. Children know how to complain, but generally do not. One child said, 'Complain? I'd change nothing. My family are perfect!' The service has received very few complaints since being registered with Ofsted. Children indicate that they feel safe with their foster families. They have the opportunity to share their views about their placements and the service generally through formal and informal channels. Overwhelmingly, children's feedback was very positive about all aspects of their care.

Children benefit from the service's promotion of their education. As placements progress, children's attendance at school improves, as do their learning outcomes. The current rate of all children's school and college attendance is 97%. Children make positive progress due to their foster carers' keen interest in helping them to meet their learning objectives and from the support and advice of the agency's educational coordinator. Other specialists, such as speech and language therapists and occupational therapists, are available to children, which helps them to achieve identified learning targets. A child explained, 'My GCSEs were stressing me out, especially maths. So ISP arranged for me to have a maths tutor. Now I'm less stressed and more confident about it all.'

Children enjoy a range of leisure and social activities that are of their choosing. The fostering service regularly facilitates activity programmes during school holidays and runs a weekly kids club on a farm. A foster carer said, 'K has very challenging behaviour and he has been banned from all our local clubs. But every week he attends ISP's kids club. The staff are fantastic with him and, for probably the first time in his life, he has friends.'

Children lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers promptly register them with primary care services and children have access to any specialist health services that they may require. Some foster carers offer specialist care for disabled children and young people. The fostering service's advisor for health supports foster carers in this area of their care. Foster carers routinely receive training in first aid and the safe administration of medication.

Children benefit significantly from the attention paid by the fostering service to their emotional and psychological well-being. Staff and foster carers receive training and expert support to sensitively communicate and explore children's emotional state. Staff and foster carers continually explore how the placement can enhance children's attachments with others, their emotional well-being and resilience.

Children develop good practical skills as a result of the agency's semi-independent programme. Most children from the age of 15 complete a self-assessment that describes practical skills targets. The agency's 'ambassador' for leaving care, together with foster carers, continually assesses children's independence skills. Older children often have the option to remain living with their foster carers under 'Staying put' arrangements. This allows young adults to continue living with their foster families, where they feel secure and loved.

Children are treated with dignity and respect. Their identity needs are generally well met by their foster families. This is particularly true of children with additional needs and older young people. However, foster carers require more support to promote children's cultural identity, in particular to prepare children more proactively to cope with forms of discrimination, such as racism.

Children have good access to their brothers and sisters, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering service manages arrangements for contact carefully. There is an on-site area for contact, and trained staff supervise contact if this is required. Staff ensure that these arrangements are always in the best interests of children.

Prospective foster carers who make enquiries with the fostering service feel valued and welcomed by the staff team. The assessment process is timely and sensitive to the needs of carers. Assessments are comprehensive, analytical and identify well the strengths and competencies that foster carers have or need to develop. The support offered to foster carers is excellent. Foster carers identify the support that they receive from the staff team as being the primary strength of the service. This view is consistently echoed by foster carers in all feedback obtained.

Children benefit from the close partnership working between their foster carers, staff of the fostering service and other professionals. Communication is regular and effective. This is particularly true with local authority social workers, education and health professionals. This supports the effective coordination of children's care.

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

The fostering service considers effective safeguarding as a priority for all placements. Foster carers are committed to developing positive relationships with children, and the agency operates a culture of openness and trust. This helps to keep children safe. Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Staff ensure that they routinely explore safeguarding issues in supervision sessions and in other foster carer forums.

Children do not go missing or are absent without permission from their foster homes. This is despite some children coming into care with a significant history of going missing. Where children are at risk of child sexual exploitation, foster carers and staff are active participants in multi-agency professionals meetings convened to address the child's risk-taking behaviour. In such cases, safety plans have proved effective. Since living with her foster carers, the risk of sexual exploitation to one young person has been reduced. She has improved her understanding of the risks posed and has adopted strategies to help keep herself safe from harm.

Since the service's registration with Ofsted there has been one allegation made by a child against their foster carers. Staff managed this incident appropriately and in accordance with child protection procedures. This ensures that appropriate support was available to the child. External safeguarding professionals, such as designated officers, are involved with the service and staff follow their advice and guidance. This helps keep children safe in the event that they are unhappy about their placements or foster carers. Managers and the staff team discuss all allegations. This is also the case for complaints against foster carers and staff. Managers respond appropriately and in accordance with the agency's complaints procedures. This also helps to keep children safe.

Children benefit from the direct work that is undertaken by their foster carers and specialist staff to help to equip them to better manage conflicts and challenging behaviour. Foster carers and staff receive training in de-escalation techniques. The fostering service has an assigned therapist, who coordinates a range of relevant therapeutic services for children. This helps foster families to promote sustained attachments, develop strategies to engage positively with children and manage their sometimes extremely challenging behaviour.

In many cases, this intervention results in the reduction of such behaviour, an increase in children's self-esteem and improved attachment to their families and peers. This is in line with the agency's attachment model of care, which forms the basis of the fostering service's practice. This is another clear strength of the service. A long-term foster carer said, 'Since the therapist has been working with us there have been mega changes. Not just for our child, but for us as well. It's

the best, the best ISP has ever had.'

Staff ensure comprehensive placement plans address changing needs and that strategies are in place to help reduce risk-taking behaviour. Foster carers devise safe care policies, which are clear about safe care guidelines for individual children. Staff complete comprehensive risk assessments at the start of each placement. Most assessments are current, although some require updating. This is also the case for unannounced visits. Some are not made annually, as required.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnerships with other safeguarding agencies. This successful collaboration promotes an effective, coordinated approach to the protection of children. A local authority social worker commented, 'ISP communicate well with me. They send me reports in good time and keep me up to date with concerns promptly.'

The fostering service has sound systems in place for the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the service. These processes are thorough and confirm that staff and members of the central list are suitable to work with vulnerable children.

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

The leadership and management of the service lack strategic oversight. The progress of service development has been slow and there are a number of breaches of the fostering regulations. Management oversight of the service is insufficiently robust, and this does not promote improvement. However, the shortfalls in the leadership and management of the service do not impact negatively on the progress and experiences of children. These are extremely positive.

Currently, there is no manager in post. The previous registered manager left their post two weeks prior to this inspection. The fostering service's responsible individual is currently in day-to-day charge of the service while the recruitment of a new manager is progressed.

Management oversight of the service requires improvement. For example, monitoring reports and quality of care reviews are largely descriptive and lack analysis. A more evaluative approach would assist the service to identify shortfalls and take remedial action.

The provider produced a very recent, comprehensive action plan, which identifies areas for improvement. However, the plan is not yet embedded in practice and so the impact of the development plan is yet to have any real impact.

Staff feel that the managers of the fostering service are sufficiently visible and offer good support. Staff supervision is regular and meaningful. Despite this, not all staff receive comprehensive inductions to ensure that they are well equipped to support foster families and children. Furthermore, some records of staff appraisals are of poor quality and do not highlight the development goals for the member of staff

concerned.

Staff have access to relevant training, although there is a lack of opportunity for staff to develop professionally. This is to promote staff's continued knowledge, skill and practice development.

Staff maintain case records well. Generally, the documentation reflects children's lives and the work undertaken with them. However, foster carers do not consistently use the fostering service's electronic recording systems. This is despite, for some foster carers, ongoing support from the staff team. The service requires a formalised standard for recording and ensuring that foster carers adhere to this standard.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is comprehensive and kept up to date. It describes well the service's aims and objectives. The two children's guides and older young people's guide provide children and young people with creative and clear information in age-appropriate language. However, the service is yet to produce a children's guide that is accessible to children who use alternative methods of communication. This is to ensure that all children have access to key information about the fostering service.

The fostering service's preparation of foster carers is effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of those whom they look after and are skilled in meeting identified needs. Although not all foster carers have undertaken the identified core training and some personal development plans are overdue for completion. In addition, foster carers do not consistently complete the training, support and development standards within the 12-month timeframe following their initial approval.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. However, the fostering panel does not include a representative from child health. Such a representative would be beneficial to the service, since a number of children in placement have complex health needs. The administration of the fostering panel is effective.

The service is financially sound and well-resourced to meet the needs of foster carers and children. The support of foster carers is excellent. Foster carers overwhelmingly indicate that support from the service is outstanding and say that this is a clear strength of the service. Staff maintain good communication and regularly visit foster carers and children at their homes. A foster carer said, 'H (child) calls my supervising social worker before he calls his own social worker. That's how well he knows her.'

The staff are appropriately qualified and committed to providing good support to children and their fostering families. One staff member said, 'The best thing about my job? Going out to visit carers and working with children. The direct work. Watching the progress of children and the hard work of foster carers. Seeing the confidence of children and foster carers increase.'

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 difference 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: 1256563

Registered provider: ISP

Registered provider address: Partnerships in Childcare Services Ltd, Wavendon Tower, Ortensia Drive, Wavendon, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Responsible individual: Tracy Livesey

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, social care inspector



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