

# Match Foster Care

Match Foster Care Limited

Severn House, 30 to 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 registered in 2012. The registration consists of two offices. The first office 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-on-Trent area under the same registration.

The fostering agency provides a range of placement types, including emergency, respite, short and long term, unaccompanied children placements and placements for young adults 'staying put'. At the time of the inspection, 140 children were living in 80 fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in April 2023. He holds a suitable management qualification.

### Inspection dates: 16 to 20 October 2023

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

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

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:** 4 March 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Children's progress is at the heart of this agency. Children receive care that is individualised, child focused and nurturing. Because of the care they receive, children make exceptional progress from their starting points. Foster carers are highly committed and dedicated to caring for children who have experienced trauma. One child expressed, 'My carer has made me believe in myself and has given me a voice and I am using my voice here right now. I should have used my voice a long time ago.' A child-focused and participative approach ensures that children flourish in all areas of their social and emotional development.

Children develop safe and secure attachments with their foster families. This helps children to feel a sense of belonging. One child said that they love their carers and love being part of their family. Another child described how they are 'very happy' living with their foster carers. Throughout the inspection, the inspectors received an overwhelming amount of positive feedback from children about their experiences living with their foster carers.

The agency strives to ensure that children have a plan of permanency. Many of the children enjoy stable and long-term placements, with some children living with their foster carers for over 10 years. One young person informed the inspectors that she has no desire to move out of her foster home. In several cases, foster carers are looking after sibling groups, enabling children to continue living together. One child told the inspectors that if it had not been for the agency, she would have been separated from her sibling. This family-focused approach helps children to maintain strong family links.

Children can stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthdays. This gives children a further sense of stability and permanence. It also enables children to pursue further education, while they develop essential life skills ready for independence. For several children, being able to remain living with their carers has helped them to secure a place at university. One child has been able to pursue a career in the Royal Navy, safe in the knowledge that they have a family home to return to for weekends and holidays.

The children have fantastic relationships with the fostering agency staff. All children spoken to during the inspection identified their supervising social worker as someone they trust and who they would call on for support should they need it. Children feel very much a part of the agency family, which further enhances their sense of belonging.

The agency goes above and beyond to ensure that children's health needs are met. The children have access to local health services, and foster carers manage children's health plans effectively. Children with complex health needs are provided with exceptional support and are making remarkable progress. For example, one

child with a life-limiting condition is thriving and making progress beyond expectations because of the wraparound care they receive. The agency employs a registered nurse who provides additional support. For example, the nurse has actively challenged other health professionals to ensure that a child receives the right procedure to rectify a tongue tie. Another child, who health professionals describe as being 'unsteady on their feet', has now been prescribed glasses to strengthen their eyesight because of her challenge. As a result of the nurse's expertise, several children are receiving the right help to meet their individual complex health needs.

Children's learning and educational progress are at the forefront of the agency's work. Consequently, all children attend education and are making outstanding progress. For example, one child is in the process of securing a place at an overseas university. Another child, who struggled with school, has just written and published his own book. This is an outstanding achievement. During the inspection, the child visited the office to read his book to the inspectors. Again, this is a remarkable achievement for the child and exceptional progress given his educational starting point.

Support from the in-house educational lead provides children and foster carers with an important source of advice and guidance. This additional support has yielded positive results. For example, several children are now receiving education that meets their learning needs. Managers and staff have high aspirations for children, whether this is through academic or vocational pathways.

The agency's house therapeutic service provides a high level of support for the children and foster carers. Thoughtful and individualised support helps children's resilience and their positive mental well-being. Foster carers receive targeted training and support to enable them to offer trauma-informed care to the children. This means that foster carers have a good understanding of the impact that trauma has on children's lives. The input of the therapist has strengthened, stabilised and reduced breakdowns. Individual therapeutic programmes are detailed and are continually monitored to ensure that they continue to meet children's specific needs. For one child, life-story work has been remarkable in supporting them to understand their journey into foster care. As a result, this child has a stronger sense of self and identity.

Family support workers are available to foster carers and children, should they require additional support. Family support workers visit children regularly and seek feedback from them about all aspects of their lives. This is undertaken routinely outside of the foster carer review process, and all feedback is used to revise the agency's development plan.

Children's participation is a strength and features throughout all aspects of the agency's work. A children's advocacy group meets on a regular basis. It is well attended and ensures that children's voices and views are heard. Managers continually review how they capture and record children's views so that improvements can be made. As a result of the children's feedback, the agency has

changed the language used in its own policies. The children have also been involved in creating a short video to encourage other children to attend their care planning meetings. As a result of this video, the agency has seen an increase in the number of children who attend and contribute to their own care plans. Children feel that they are listened to and that their wishes, views and feelings are heard.

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

Foster carers and staff have good knowledge of individual children and their potential risks. They follow procedures to keep them safe. During the inspection, the children told the inspectors that they feel safe living with their carers. Individual risk assessments and safer care plans are in place and are reviewed on a regular basis. They provide clear guidance to foster carers, which reduces the risks posed to the children.

Children can identify a trusted adult to talk to, including supervising social workers and carers. One child informed the inspectors that the agency is helpful and always listens. As a result, children develop a sense of belonging and safety because of the support they receive.

Managers ensure that two unannounced visits are made to each fostering household every year. The records of these visits are detailed and highlight that children are spoken to alone and that safety checks of the foster carers' homes are carried out. This provides further opportunities for professionals to meet the children and ensure that they are happy and safe.

Children rarely go missing. When they do, carers follow clear processes to help to locate the child and return them home. There is good oversight of incidents when children go missing. Risk assessments are revised promptly and support is put in place as appropriate.

Some children are known to self-harm. In each case, appropriate and effective action has been taken to help to keep children safe. Close working relationships with local authority social workers and specialist health professionals ensure that children receive the right support.

The registered manager responds to allegations about foster carers in a swift manner. He works alongside relevant partner agencies to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place. The registered manager's investigations are considered by the fostering panel to ensure that there is independent review and oversight. This supports good decision-making for children and ensures the ongoing suitability of foster carers.

Safe recruitment practice is strong. Careful recruitment of foster carers and staff ensures that only suitable people work with children. Recruitment checks are thorough and meet the requirements of regulation.

Overall, the agency has monitoring systems in place to ensure safe medication administration practice. However, foster carers are not consistently recording the medication given to children. Although this has not had an impact on children's health, it is not good practice. During the inspection, the manager took steps to address this shortfall.

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

A suitable and experienced registered manager manages the fostering agency. He is extremely ambitious and has high aspirations for the children. He is equally supported by an enthusiastic responsible individual who is committed to providing high-quality care that improves and enhances the children's lives.

The leadership team is visible in the agency and maintains frequent contact with children, foster carers and staff. This ensures that leaders and managers have robust oversight and understanding of the progress that children are making.

The leadership team has a good understanding and diligent oversight of the agency's strengths and areas for development. They have effective monitoring systems in place. This includes monthly monitoring and case file audits to help to identify any shortfalls in practice.

The registered manager has worked hard to create the right environment for staff to work effectively. Staff told the inspector that they enjoy working for the agency and feel that the registered manager and responsible individual are very supportive. The stability of the team is a real strength of the agency, and its child-focused approach ensures that children receive the right outcomes.

Supervising social workers manage small caseloads. This means that foster carers receive a high level of support. Staff are suitably qualified, experienced and highly dedicated to their work. This level of guidance and support ensures that good-quality care is provided to children.

Foster carers speak highly of the support they receive. One foster carer described how the agency goes 'above and beyond' with the support they provide. Another foster carer described the agency as 'like a family'.

The leadership team ensures that supervising social workers are provided with regular supervision. This professional supervision provides the social workers with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their own practice. In addition, staff and leaders receive effective support through team and management meetings and training. Staff say that they feel supported by the leadership team.

The manager promotes research and evidence-based practice and shares relevant and current safeguarding publications with staff. Team exploration of these safeguarding reviews helps to raise staff's awareness of new and emerging themes in relation to safeguarding. For example, as a result of considering a practice review, the managers have ensured that professional curiosity is at the forefront of the

practice of supervising social workers. Consequently, research-informed practice is embedded throughout the work of the agency.

Supervising social workers carry out detailed assessments that provide a comprehensive analysis of a potential foster carer's strengths and vulnerabilities. Research-informed practice supports social workers to make clear recommendations. For example, social workers use a wide range of social work theories, including the secure base model and attachment theory to explore the applicant's understanding of the lived experiences of the children they will care for. The robustness of the assessments ensures that only suitable carers care for children.

The fostering panel is varied in terms of skills, experience and cultural diversity. The panel provides a rigorous quality assurance process that ensures that there is a thorough oversight of the quality of assessments. An experienced panel chair provides clear reasons for the recommendations made. This is further enhanced by the agency decision-maker, who makes detailed and reasoned decisions in a timely manner. This level of scrutiny ensures that only carers with the skills to care for children and keep them safe are recruited.

Leaders, managers and supervising social workers have close working relationships with children's social workers. One local authority social worker informed the inspectors that the agency is 'very present'. Another social worker told the inspectors that communication with the agency is 'proactive'. This ensures that placements are in children's best interests.

Minor shortfalls were found in some of the children's records, such as missing local authority care and placement plans. This means that foster carers may not have the most up-to-date and relevant information. However, supervising social workers routinely take minutes of meetings although they do not consistently escalate concerns about children's missing documentation with local authorities. This is a recording issue and does not impact on the care children receive.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 16, paragraph 6.11)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service should follow this up with the responsible authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 60, paragraph 31.2)

### **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:** SC442843

**Registered provider:** Match Foster Care Limited

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

**Responsible individual:** Carrie Marsh

**Registered manager:** James Bates

**Telephone number:** 01905 770500

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

## **Inspectors**

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector  
Sophie Hills, Social Care Inspector



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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
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