

# SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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Unit 5, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, Leeds LS12 6AJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

SWIIS Foster Care Limited is a privately owned company in England. This is one of five independent fostering agencies that the company operates. It provides short-term, emergency, long-term, respite and short-break placements. The agency also offers placements for children with specific care needs, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, parent and child, children with disabilities and additional needs, and 'staying put' placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 91 approved fostering households and 124 children placed with foster carers.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since December 2015. She is a registered social worker and has completed the level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

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: 20 to 23 June 2022

**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:** 18 June 2018

**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 experience stability and have a sense of permanence in where they live. The agency works with local authorities and encourages special guardianship orders and adoption to further enhance children's stability. Staying put arrangements ensure that when children reach the age of 18, they can remain with their foster family when appropriate. Children have strong, trusting relationships with foster carers and have positive experiences.

The impact on children is considered in every action that the agency takes. The voice of the child is heard and acted on. For example, children have been consulted regarding panel questions and what it takes to be a good foster carer. These comments and feedback have been incorporated into the panel's questions for new and existing foster carers.

There are numerous opportunities for children to be involved, either in support groups or planned activities. This enables children to meet with each other and share experiences as well as taking part in group learning which is led by supervising social workers. Children have a sense of community and family and are able to express how they feel. The agency uses this information to help other children, for example children created a letter for children new to foster care. This helps children moving in with new foster carers to understand what is happening and that they are not alone.

There is a sense of family and community that is shared by supervising social workers, foster carers and children. Supervising social workers know the children well and have built strong relationships through talking and working closely together. Foster carers' own children are included in everything, from pre-assessment to birthdays and activities, with a group specifically for birth children. This involvement helps to improve stability for children as the foster carers and their families are well supported.

Children's own birth families are included in line with children's plans. Foster carers understand the importance for children to see their family and support this. The agency and foster carers are quick to respond to a child's request to see family where appropriate. Some children have returned to their family safely due to foster carers helping to rebuild relationships.

Foster carers, children and supervising social workers benefit from a wraparound team of support from behaviour management specialists, therapists, education and placement support. This provides all those involved with the skills they need to continue to support children and increases stability and has led to children making significant progress.

Research-informed practice underpins care for children. For example, supervising social workers researched children's individual needs and shared this with the foster carers. This enabled foster carers to adapt their way of working to meet the children's needs. It also helped to educate children and resulted in a child making a disclosure of harm they experienced when in the family home. Without this, children would have been unlikely to continue to live together and may have caused harm to each other.

Unplanned moves for children are infrequent. The manager identified that some of these were linked to newer foster carers and did a full review into the recruitment and support they received. New foster carers now have a dedicated support group as a result of these findings to provide them with additional support. This has further reduced the number of unplanned moves.

Children make excellent progress from their starting points. Outcome trackers are in place for all children and capture the progress and any reasons for declines. These are regularly reviewed and actions in place to further improve outcomes for children. The support put in place helps children to flourish.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, education support was put in place for all foster carers. The agency's education specialist provided numerous resources for children during this period. They also challenged education providers to enable children to return to school as soon as possible. Additional support was also put in place for children to manage their anxiety about moving back into larger groups when schools fully reopened. Children continued to make progress in their education during this difficult time.

The agency has high aspirations for children's education and achievements. Expectations are based on figures of children who are not looked after. Education progress is tracked and additional support put in place, such as extra tutoring. The education worker supports the supervising social workers and foster carers to ensure that any additional education needs are known and understood. This includes ensuring that any diagnosis of a child is in place and is accurate. Nearly all children who are over 16 years old are in education, with some going to university.

Children told inspectors of their positive experiences. Foster care reviews always include the child's opinions and that they are happy with the care they are receiving. Children feel listened to and the agency supports them to have their voice heard. Children have been supported to write to a judge to say that they did not feel safe with their families and therefore did not want to see them.

Foster carers feel well supported, which enables them to continue to support the children. It is recognised that respite is helpful in maintaining stability for children but is only done so with careful consideration as to the needs of the child. The agency is working on increasing the amount of respite options for foster carers and has put other measures, including placement support officers visiting, to help support children and their foster carers.



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

Children benefit from a high level of care and support from their foster carers and have built positive relationships. This enables foster carers to use these relationships to explore children's concerns and put plans in place to support and help keep them safer.

Risks to children are well known and understood by carers and supervising social workers. These are clearly documented within the children's plans, which are reviewed regularly. The manager has excellent oversight of all children and has additional focus on those at higher risk. This enables the agency to implement further plans to reduce risk.

The manager recognises patterns in children's behaviour and responds quickly to this. As a result, a girls' group has been set up to help support them with concerns relating to friendships and potential sexual exploitation. Resources have also been provided by the agency which are available to foster carers, children and other workers to enable one-to-one work to be undertaken. This has helped to reduce risk for children and given them the information they need to be aware of the risks to them.

Occasions when children go missing from their homes are reducing significantly. Staff explore with foster carers the circumstances around why children go missing to enable them to try and address any concerns. The agency works with external professionals to try and reduce children going missing. This includes challenging others when their decisions are not supportive or increase risk.

All foster carers have received training in physical intervention, with a focus being on de-escalation. Supervising social workers have also had this training, which enables them to support foster carers. In addition, when reviewing reports of when a child has to be held, supervising social workers are aware of other steps that foster carers should have taken. As a result, physical interventions are used rarely.

Assessments of new foster carers are detailed and thorough. This ensures that any concerns are identified and discussed to allow for informed decisions to be made regarding suitability. When foster carers move from other agencies, they go through the same process, which ensures that the agency can make their own decisions as to suitability.

Recruitment of new staff and panel members is detailed and considers previous experience, skills and knowledge. Checks for administrative staff are as thorough as for those staff working directly with children, as the agency recognises that they will have time with children and will have access to sensitive information. These additional checks provide assurances that those who work with children are safe to do so.

The agency ensures that foster care homes are suitable environments for children to live in that are free from hazards. Any individuals living in the home over the age of 18 have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks to ensure that they do not pose a risk to children. In addition, caravans owned by the foster carers have the relevant safety checks and additional risk assessments in place for children to access them safely.

Allegations and complaints are managed well. The agency ensures that all parties are notified in a timely manner and they work well with external agencies to explore and resolve issues. Investigations focus on the impact on children and explore the context to any complaint or allegation made. This enables the agency to identify if any training or safety plans are needed but also ensures that the agency can address any safeguarding concerns. Following any allegation or serious concern, an early review of suitability takes place to ensure that the outcomes of findings are captured and that suitability decisions can be made.

When foster carers resign prior to any allegation or complaint being concluded, processes are in place to ensure that this is clearly recorded and that information is readily available for any future references. The manager understands the additional responsibility to notify the DBS if the threshold is met.

Research and good practice are shared across the agency. This includes during training, development days and safeguarding newsletters. Safeguarding newsletters cover a range of topics to educate and enhance knowledge. The learning from specific work with children is shared to enable all staff to adapt their ways of working. In addition, research-informed practice changes how the agency fundamentally runs, including changes to policies and procedures and risk assessments, most recently for children under one year old.

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

The manager has high aspirations for all of the children and this runs throughout the agency and foster carers. Supervising social workers and foster carers all value the support the manager offers and say that she is visible and present.

The manager has excellent oversight and is analytical when reviewing information. She uses the systems available to her to ensure that she has the information needed to make informed decisions. If negative patterns or trends are noticed, plans are immediately put in place to address this, often before it has had an impact on children.

The manager has instilled in the agency's staff the importance of ensuring that children are placed with foster carers who have the ability to meet their needs. This includes considering the existing family dynamics within the home and ensuring that the foster carers are involved in any decisions. Supervising social workers ensure that they speak to professionals already involved in the child's life to have a full understanding of their needs. The time taken to ensure that foster carers can support children is improving the overall outcomes for children.

Supervising social workers are also matched well with foster carers to ensure that they have the skills they need to support families and their children. Additional support is put in place for children with complex needs or where specialist support is needed, such as parent and baby placements. Foster carers, and therefore children, receive the support they need.

Supervisions for supervising social workers are of good quality and recognise the individual needs of the staff member. Support is in place for supervising social workers to help address any shortfalls, including protected time for staff to work on administrative tasks. Every family is discussed during supervisions and recorded in their individual file, which is then overseen by the manager. This ensures that information is known and readily available and provides the manager with an oversight of current events.

Panel members are curious and seek clarity when reviewing information, both in records and early reviews. They scrutinise information and make child-focused informed decisions which are balanced and fair. The fostering panel chair has a wealth of experience and ensures that panel members all contribute. The agency decision-maker is confident to make decisions and challenge and seek clarity. This ensures that decisions are made that are well considered and help to protect children and meet their needs.

Foster carers and staff have extensive training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills they need to support children. When foster carers move to the agency, they are given the same opportunities to undertake the training as new foster carers. This ensures that their knowledge is up to date and in line with the ethos of the agency.

The manager continually strives to improve the lives of children. She knows the agency's strengths and weaknesses and has clear plans in place to address and reduce the impact of any areas in need of improvement. This ensures that the agency continues to develop and improve. The introduction of a new quality assurance manager has improved recording. In addition, the quality assurance manager leads development days for the supervising social workers to share ideas and knowledge.

The manager encourages staff to research and to be creative. The manager ensures that ideas from staff are brought to fruition and then shared within the team to build on practice. Foster carers are also encouraged to voice their opinion and this is responded to. For example, secondary foster carers were unable to attend training in the week and therefore training days on weekends were put in place.

Daily recordings for children are detailed and give an overview of the child's life and are reviewed by supervising social workers. Any areas for improvement are identified and acted on, which improves the quality of recording, including for established foster carers. Every child has a memory box in place to capture their journey, even if they move on from the agency.

The agency has a well-embedded model of care to support children that all foster carers are trained in and this is evident throughout the agency. The agency is currently moving to a different model which has a similar foundation but further enhances the work that the foster carers and supervising social workers are doing to help children progress further.

During COVID-19 restrictions, the manager ensured that support remained available to foster carers and children. Most support groups were held virtually during the periods of restrictions, with additional support and resources provided to foster carers and children to keep them engaged. When able to do so, activities were arranged for children. Visits still took place when this was needed, either to safeguard children or to support foster carers. The agency is now rebuilding the face-to-face support groups and additional activities. The agency's actions helped to reduce the emotional impact and stress for foster carers, children and supervising social workers.

## **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:** SC358729

**Registered provider:** SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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## **Inspectors**

Debra Boldy, Social Care Inspector  
Rachel Walker, Social Care Inspector

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