

# FCA Midlands

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Address</b>	41 Brunel Parkway Pride Park DERBY DE24 8HR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01332 364312
<b>Email</b>	davina.stewart@thefca.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Foster Care Associates Ltd
<b>Registered manager</b>	Davina Adella Stewart
<b>Responsible individual</b>	David John Oldham
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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

Foster Care Associates is an independent fostering agency. It is a UK wide organisation with its headquarters in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire.

Foster Care Associates, Midland (hereinafter FCA, Midland) is a branch of the national organisation. Its regional headquarters is in Derby. The manager for the region is the Registered Manager and is based at the regional headquarters. There is also an assistant regional manager. The placement team, therapists and educational liaison officers work across the region.

FCA Midland's local and regional offices stretch across Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, as well as areas of Cheshire, Shropshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire, providing support, training and assistance to foster carers and looked after children. Team managers, supervising social workers, support workers and ancillary staff are based in each local office.

FCA, Midland's stated aim is to offer high quality family placements and related support services to looked after children and young people and to provide the opportunities for children and young people to achieve their full potential and to live fulfilling lives in the community.

FCA, Midland offers short-term, long-term, bridging, assessment, parent and child, solo and enhanced placements. It undertakes recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. Its support workers, therapists and education staff offer a wide range of support to foster placements.

### **Summary**

This is a full, key inspection which was announced. All key standards were inspected. These include national minimum standards relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation.

The inspection finds FCA, Midland to be good overall with outstanding practice in helping children and young people to achieve and enjoy what they do, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being. Good outcomes were achieved in helping children to be healthy, stay safe and in organisation.

The agency performs strongly in developing children's self-esteem and enabling them to achieve their educational potential. The promotion of equality and diversity is also excellent. Children's views and contributions are highly valued and foster carers are provided with a strong training programme and good support.

The agency has some minor shortfalls in relation to administrative records, policies and procedures, assessments and reviews which do not fully underpin the work of the service. Actions and recommendations have been made in these areas.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

Following its previous inspection the agency was required to ensure that before making a placement, the responsible authority enters into a written foster placement agreement with the foster carer relating to the child, which covers all the matters specified in Schedule 6. This has improved although respite placements made by the agency still do not always have foster placement agreements completed at the point of placement. This will be the subject of a recommendation.

The agency was also required to ensure foster care agreements cover all matters specified in regulations. This again has not been fully implemented and will be subject to a further requirement.

All other previous requirements and recommendations have been implemented. Administrative records have been tightened and staffing contingency plans strengthened.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The agency delivers good health outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people receive health care which meets their needs for physical, emotional and social development and which are identified and met through appropriate matching with foster carers. Arrangements for medical consent are clear at the outset of the placement and sufficient health information is acquired at the point of referral.

Foster carers are given a health passport in which to record all health information including medication and health appointments. This ensures a comprehensive record of health information is recorded by foster carers which moves with young people when they leave the placement.

A programme of training has been developed for staff and foster carers which includes first aid, disability awareness, attachment and child development, autism and self-harm. This helps foster carers promote children and young people's physical, mental and emotional well-being.

The agency employs a team of therapists who provide assessments, training and direct work with children and foster carers. The therapists work alongside schools, children and adolescent mental health services and other key partner agencies. This has a positive impact on placement stability supporting carers to continue with placements that would have otherwise broken down.

The agency's smoking policy is out of line with all recent guidance. Foster carers who are smokers are being approved to take children from birth if they smoke outside of the house and for children over five if they smoke in a designated room in the house. As a result of this policy young children could be in the company of foster carers who are smoking as children under the age of five need to be supervised all the time. Those over the age of five could be affected by entering rooms in which smoking takes place or from which smoke leaks into the home. This policy allows poor role modelling in relation to smoking, and from a very early age.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The agency has developed good systems and practice which help to ensure children and young people are kept safe. There are a range of policies and procedures to safeguard children and young people in their care which reduces the risk to their safety. The safeguarding policy, however, is inaccurate as it states the responsibility for investigating concerns or allegations lies with the local children's social care authority where the alleged abuse has taken place rather than where the child is living. This could lead to confusion and delay in reporting safeguarding concerns.

Staff and foster carers receive training in safeguarding and in promoting positive behaviour. The agency has a policy where training in the use of methods of physical restraint is not provided to foster carers. This reflects their policy position that physical restraint should not be a feature of behaviour management strategies for children and young people in foster care. Foster carers receive training in non-violent crisis intervention which may include physical, as well as verbal and postural personal safety techniques where deemed appropriate and foster carers are in agreement. Occasionally, however, foster carers are at times having to hold children for their own safety. The agency is aware of this and are reviewing their policy with regard to providing training in the use of physical intervention.

Good practices in recruitment and staff vetting help ensure that those who work for the agency are suitable to do so. Foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for children. Homes visited during the inspection were warm, welcoming and comfortable. The agency ensures foster homes remain safe through supervision and rigorous health and safety checks which are reviewed annually.

Children and young people are well matched with their foster carers and this enables their overall needs to be met. There is a matching document in place which provides a good tool for considering the matching of foster carers' skills to the needs of specific children and young people. This is supported by carer profiles which are updated annually.

Foster placement agreements are completed along with other placement planning information prior to or at the time of placements being made. Some shortfalls, however, were seen in relation to respite placements where foster placement agreements have not always been completed on time. This could leave foster carers without the full support they need to understand their role and responsibilities in relation to each child placed.

Detailed safe-caring policies are in place and reviewed on the placement of a child or young person. These ensure the individual needs of all within the fostering household are addressed to enable them to be protected from the risk of harm. Risk assessments are also completed which help to safeguard children within their placements and the fostering household. Young people feel safe and have commented that they feel well protected and happy with their foster carers.

The agency has three fostering panels which are organised so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care. The panels are made up of people from diverse backgrounds which contributes to the effectiveness of discussions.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency is excellent in enabling children and young people to enjoy and achieve, to develop self-esteem and to achieve their educational potential.

The agency actively promotes equality and diversity and celebrates differences. This is celebrated through Black History Month which is organised on an annual basis. The agency recruits staff and foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children placed and who are able to support and reflect their identities. Training is provided in equality and diversity for both staff and carers.

The agency employs children's services specialists whose aim is to ensure that they are able to meet the diverse needs of children placed within the agency nationally and locally. Activities, groups and forums promote diversity and identity to meet the individual needs of all children placed and the agency has developed good links with external agencies working with immigration and asylum seeking children.

A team of education liaison workers work with children and foster carers to access appropriate educational placements. They support children and young people who are not attending school full-time with structured learning opportunities to enable them to attain qualifications in nationally recognised certification schemes. In the last year 79% of young people placed who sat GCSEs gained at least one GCSE at Grade A\*-G and 24% gained at least five GCSEs at A\*-C.

Young people in year 11 receive 10 hours private tuition each week. This aims to help young people achieve examination results which reflect their abilities by redressing some of the shortfalls of their previous education.

Children and young people's individual achievements are celebrated on a regular basis in awards ceremonies and in various publications which detail young people's poetry and art work.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency encourages children and young people to promote and support family contacts. Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining links with children's birth families. They encourage children to build relationships with their families and provide emotional support. This contributes to the development of emotional stability in children and young people. Guidance is available for foster carers and arrangements for contact are considered during referral and matching.

The agency support arrangements for face-to-face contact and has facilities in offices where family contact can be supervised. These are comfortable and are equipped with play materials and books.

Training is provided to carers and staff in life story work. A memory box is given at the time of each new placement to enable carers and children to collect photographs, programmes, certificates and other pieces of memorabilia that will form a part of the child's history of that placement.

The agency actively consults with young people to ensure that it continues to improve and to ensure that it meets the needs of the young people placed with them. A high regard is placed

on listening to children and young people and some excellent practices have been developed in involving them in the running of the agency.

The agency runs a children and young people's forum which includes both children and young people who are placed in the region and staff. The regional forum provides representatives who attend the agency's national children and young people's forum. The agency has also organised visits to House of Parliament to undertake a parliamentary launch of a Young People's Manifesto. Children and young people contribute to developing activity programmes, welcome packs for children and young people, staff recruitment and newsletters.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency provides excellent support to young people in developing independence skills so that they are able to successfully move into adulthood. The fostering service performs strongly in ensuring that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Training and guidance is provided to carers about promoting young people's independent living skills.

The agency has developed steps to independence assessments for young people aged 14 years and over. This allows an early assessment of the learning goals for young people in moving on into independence and operates alongside the young person's pathway plan.

The agency's support services, which includes a leaving care co-ordinator, arranges various independence groups which are task orientated and which include certificated courses. Support services also conduct direct one-to-one work with young people and arranges a three-day training event annually on a farm in Wales.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The organisation of the fostering service supports good and outstanding outcomes for children and young people. The agency has developed good management and organisational practices to support the fostering task. It is in the process of reorganisation and has recently amalgamated two registered branches to become a midlands regional office. It is organised in a way which delivers an effective service to children, young people and foster carers.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency actively promotes equality and diversity and celebrates differences. Activities, groups and forums promote diversity and identity to meet the individual needs of all children placed and the agency has developed good links with external agencies working with immigration and asylum seeking children. The agency recruits staff and foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children placed and who are able to support and reflect their identities. Training is provided in equality and diversity for both staff and carers.

The agency has a national Statement of Purpose that includes an insert about the regional midlands branch. A welcome pack is provided for every child and young person placed, which includes an interactive welcome CD, staff & carers' welcome booklets, guide for children booklet,



file of facts or a Toby bear book for younger children, memory box, memory book, camera and photo album. A handbook is also given for sons and daughters of foster carers. These documents are supported by a range of policies and procedures and the foster carers' handbook. There are some policies which are inaccurate and do not reflect recent changes in working practice, however, staff and foster carers demonstrate a good working knowledge of up-to-date practice and procedures.

There are clear management structures in the agency which have been further strengthened since the reorganisation. This has improved the levels of support although staffing shortfalls remain in some offices. Staff are provided with regular supervision from suitably qualified senior staff.

There are procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance although monitoring in all matters required in regulation is not always clearly evidenced. The agency is currently in a process of changing to a new quality monitoring system which will address this issue.

The fostering service recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. The assessment process is robust in testing the quality of applicants although there remains some variation in the quality of assessments. The annual review reports of foster carers also vary and are not always effective enough to support good decision making about the continued suitability of foster carers or the suitability of their terms of approval. Carers' reviews are taking place although some are outside of the 12 month period of time set by regulation.

Some of the terms of approval of foster carers are vague which could result in confusion and inappropriate placements of children being made with carers who have not been assessed as able to meet their needs. This is only being prevented from happening in practice through rigorous matching processes.

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child and young person placed in their care. The service provides excellent training opportunities for both foster carers and staff with a wide range of training opportunities on offer. The training required by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is being undertaken by foster carers. Currently 61% of foster carers have completed this training or are registered with the CWDC.

Good support and supervision practices are taking place which ensures that children's care remains appropriate and is constantly reviewed and evaluated. This ensures that foster carers are well supported so that they are able to appropriately care for the young people placed with them. Many foster carers have commented that they feel the agency provides outstanding training, support and networking.

Foster care agreements support the management, roles and responsibilities of foster carers. The approval information recorded in them, however, is not consistent with each carer's actual approval. This could lead to confusion about the carer's approval and subsequent placements.

The administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations. They are of an excellent standard, comprehensive, well managed and audited.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
9	ensure the fostering service provider shall prepare and implement a written policy which sets out the procedure to be followed to provide for the prompt referral to the area authority in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect (Regulation 12)	31 July 2010
22	ensure that if the fostering service provider decides to approve a person as a foster parent it enters into a written agreement with the foster carer covering all the matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 28)	31 July 2010
16	ensure foster carers reviews take place at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 29(2))	31 July 2010

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure foster carers are clear about their role in terms of helping to promote the health of any child in their care. This refers to the agency's policy regarding smoking (NMS 12.6)
- ensure foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child and young person placed. This refers to training in physical intervention (NMS 23.1)
- ensure foster placement agreements are in place for all children and young people. This refers in particular to respite placements made by the agency (NMS 8.4)
- ensure the assessment of foster carers considers the qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering and consider them in relation to all matters in Standard 17.7 (NMS17.7)
- ensure there are structures and systems in place to ensure the approvals and reviews of carers are clear and managed effectively. (NMS 16.6)