

Anglia Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

This independent fostering agency has its office base in Norfolk; it recruits, trains and supports foster carers across East Anglia and the East of England region. The agency provides a range of placements for all age groups, including short, medium and long term care and permanency.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This full inspection was announced in advance and planned with the agency.

The agency provides a good service with positive outcomes for young people. There are some outstanding areas of practice. These include the strong quality of relationships between young people and foster carers, which contribute to the feelings of safety, security and belonging that young people describe. Young people are very well supported to achieve to the best of their ability in education and are helped to plan for their future, including further education. There is widespread consultation with young people and carers. This includes regular contact between agency support workers and carers and young people. Carers are very appreciative of the support and supervision they get from the support workers, which enables them to provide good quality placements for young people. Matching is a real strength of the agency. Making suitable, well-matched placements contributes to the stability of placements and in turn to positive outcomes for young people.

Shortfalls identified are all linked to records or systems. There are sound health and safety systems and reviews of carers, but records are not full and clear. While the foster panel works effectively, minutes do not reflect the discussions or give clear reasons for the recommendations that the panel makes. The agency provides good internal support for carers who are involved in child protection investigations, however there is not an independent element to this. The service undertakes internal monitoring, but does not send reports of reviews of the quality of care to the Chief Inspector as required by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of this service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service and its carers work effectively to ensure that young people can live in healthy environments and have their health needs met well. Responses to surveys from social workers, young people and carers all include very positive comments on the way in which young people's health is promoted. A social worker commented that: 'X is supported both physically and emotionally. Appointments are supported by the carer transporting and attending meetings around health.' Carers say that they get help to support young people's health in relation to their cultural needs. The agency advocates strongly for young people to make sure that they receive health services to meet their individual needs. It provides training for carers, such as first aid and promoting healthy eating, to help them provide good health support for young people. Young people live with foster carers in homes that are decorated, furnished and maintained to a good standard. Support staff discuss health and safety matters with carers to ensure that hazards for young people can be removed as far as is practical. The agency undertakes unannounced visits to foster homes; however, the process for these unannounced visits to inspect the foster homes and make sure that they continue to meet the needs of children is not always clearly documented. This is particularly the case in respect of health and safety checks. While the practice of agency staff is protecting young people, the lack of clear records does limit the management oversight of this.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people feel safe and extremely well cared for in their foster homes. A social worker said that the young people they had placed with the agency, 'tell me they are happy with (the carers) and feel safe, cared for and loved' and other young people say that they feel safe in their placements. Carers are trained in safe care and use clear safe care policies to help them provide good placements. The safe care policies are individualised, so they are relevant and effective for the young people in the placements. Carers work effectively with young people to help them understand how to keep themselves safe. At the same time they provide good support for young people to take appropriate risks. This helps young people to develop an awareness of risk and safety and to learn how they can function in their homes and the community. It supports them to have an appropriate range of experiences while avoiding unnecessary risks. Young people who are fostered by the agency seldom go missing. Carers work with them to help discourage them from going missing and respond appropriately if they do. There are clear and easily accessible guidelines for carers if this does happen and they say that the agency takes such events seriously. This all helps to provide good protection for young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have exceptionally strong and supportive relationships with their carers. They made comments such as, 'I am loved', 'my carers are loving and nice' and 'I am happy where I am and would not want to move'. This enables young people to develop and practice skills to build and maintain positive relationships. They can also develop in confidence and learn how to regulate their feelings in positive and acceptable ways. Carers have supervision with their support workers, which covers the needs of young people in depth and looks at ways of managing their behaviour. They describe the support workers as having 'huge experience and knowledge'. This results in very good support to carers and positive outcomes for young people.

Young people also gain in confidence and build their self esteem through a wide range of activities. These are encouraged and supported by their carers. Carers also support young people to make positive friendships and relationships with their peers. They can visit friends' homes and have friends to visit them, as would be normal in a family. The agency actively promotes discussion about delegated authority, so that carers know what decisions they can make for young people. This includes decisions about activities, school trips and visiting friends. It helps to avoid unnecessary delays and bureaucracy for young people, while at the same time being clear about the limits of the decisions the carers can make.

Young people receive a high level of support and encouragement to achieve their educational potential. One said their carers, 'help me to get the right help to be successful in my education', another said of his carers, 'we talk about university and college'. Carers say that the agency strongly supports the young people's education and encourages carers to be actively involved in meetings about education. They regularly discuss education in supervision with their support workers. The agency's website has links to other internet sites that can help carers support young people in their education, for example through homework.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are very clear that the agency takes their wishes and feelings into account in all aspects of their care. This includes their lives in the foster homes as well as the running of the agency.

They said that carers, 'always listen' and 'we talk about things together'. Another spoke of being involved in a group to look at the agency's children's guide and the positive benefits this had for them personally. This level of consultation is not limited to older young people, but takes place across all age ranges. Young people are regularly consulted as part of carer reviews. The agency's support workers regularly speak to young people in placements and there are consultation groups for young people to attend. Consequently, young people are confident that their views are

important to the agency and will be listened to. One carer said: 'If a child wants to talk about anything, the service is always willing to listen and help. Time is not an issue.' The agency and carers provide young people with personalised care that meets their needs very well and promotes their individual identity. One young person said that carers, 'understand what I am going through'. Social workers gave examples of carers helping young people to develop emotionally and of them promoting young people's identity and culture. Young people gain in confidence through taking part in leisure activities. Carers encourage the young people to take part in such activities and take a keen interest in their achievements.

Carers recognise the importance of young people's contact with their families. They take very seriously their role in promoting that contact and making sure that it is of a high quality. Contact arrangements are clearly recorded and carers have a thorough understanding of these arrangements. Consequently young people benefit from meaningful contact with their families wherever possible. Carers welcome young people into the foster homes in a caring and sensitive way. They receive thorough information on young people before placements wherever possible, so that they can be well prepared and make sound decisions on placements. They say that the agency only place young people if they feel the match is good and they can meet those young people's needs well. This contributes to the very positive way that young people feel they are cared for. They made many positive comments such as, 'my carers are loving and nice'. One said: 'My foster parents and family are the best. I could never ask for anyone better.' The agency staff and carers support planned moves wherever possible. This helps to avoid the added trauma and disruption of unplanned moves for young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency is committed to providing this service for young people to help support them into adulthood, so that they can reach their potential. Young people and social workers say that carers help to prepare young people for adulthood. Stable placements with minimal disruptions reinforce this. Young people can and do remain with their foster carers into legal adulthood if this is on their best interests.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Prospective carers are assessed effectively to ensure that they are suitable and able to foster young people. They describe this process as supportive. They undertake a 'skills to foster' course, which they say prepares them well for the task of fostering. All carers are subject to an annual review to ensure they remain suitable to care for young people. The first annual review is presented to the foster panel. There is a thorough system to review the suitability of foster carers to provide safe and appropriate placements for young people. However, the reviews records do not all contain sufficient information, or reflect the review process, for example, the health

and safety checks. Carers and support staff confirm that they take place, but they not clearly updated for the records. The fostering panel undertakes a quality assurance process by reporting to the agency on the quality of the foster carer assessments that are presented. The panel have varied backgrounds so that they can make suitable recommendations based on broad knowledge and experience. Panel members have a good induction and ongoing training. The minutes of foster panels do not contain sufficient information to show the reasons for the recommendations that they make. While the process of the panel is robust, lack of clear minutes limits the agency's ability to monitor the effectiveness of the panel and does not evidence clear reasons for recommendations that will stand up to scrutiny.

The agency has a very strong commitment to appropriate matching of young people with foster carers. They provide the carers with all the information on young people that they have available. Carers say that the agency actively seek any further information that is needed to make suitable placements. This helps to ensure that carers can meet young people's individual needs and placements are more likely to be stable, reducing avoidable disruption for young people.

There is a suitable Statement of Purpose that accurately sets out how the agency operates. There are two versions of the children's guide, aimed at younger and older age groups. The children's guides are very clearly written using appropriate language and making good use of pictures. They are also available in different formats and languages making them very accessible for young people. Managers in the agency have considerable, relevant experience and qualifications. There is a comprehensive training programme for carers to help them meet young people's needs successfully. Carers describe training as good or excellent and say that they have specific training to allow them to meet the individual needs of young people. Carers are exceptionally positive about the support and supervision that they get from support workers. Each foster carer is supervised by a named and appropriately qualified support worker. Supervision takes place regularly and focuses on the needs of the young people in placement. Carers have easy access to a handbook and a carer's website, which provide them with policies and procedures. They can contact someone from the agency for advice at all times. Agency staff are well supervised, supported and trained to ensure that they can work with carers to provide good outcomes for young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency makes good arrangements to meet young people's individual needs, including those related to race, health and age. The care of young people is very individualised, for example, through safe care policies written with specific young people in mind.

There is clear guidance and training available for staff and carers in relation to safeguarding, so they can provide safe placements for young people. This also helps to ensure there are appropriate responses to any safeguarding concerns. Safeguarding is covered in the initial skills to foster course and in separate, dedicated training. Carers say that they receive good support from the agency if there are safeguarding investigations. The agency has arranged for independent support for carers, but at present this is limited to telephone support and does not meet the

criteria set out in the national minimum standards. The service is managed effectively and efficiently so it can deliver a good service to the young people placed with its carers. They seek the views of carers, young people and social workers. Monitoring is mostly done informally and due to the current size of the service and involvement of all three directors, this is reasonably effective. However reports on the reviews of the quality of care of the service are not sent in to the Chief Inspector.

The fostering service supports carers to be involved in discussions and meetings about young people. This includes planning meetings, so that carers know what is expected of them to meet young people's needs. However, the agency does not regularly get placement plans from placing authorities. Carers say that they believe the agency does follow up any missing information, but this is not clearly documented.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
30 (2011)	ensure that foster carers' case records contain reports of reviews of approval (Regulation 30(2)(e))	27/04/2012
24 (2011)	ensure that the fostering panel make a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations (Regulation 24(2))	30/03/2012
35 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with a copy of any review conducted to improve the quality of foster care provided by the agency. (Regulation 35(2))	25/05/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster homes are inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that they continue to meet the needs of foster children, particularly in respect of health and safety checks (NMS 10.5)
- provide independent support for carers who are subject to a child protection investigation, and their families; this should include information and advice about the process, emotional support and if needed mediation between the carer and the service and/or advocacy (NMS 22.12)
- follow up any missing care plans for young people with the responsible authority.

(NMS 31.2)