

Child Care Bureau Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC034788
Inspection date	12/02/2013
Inspector	Christy Wannop
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

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Date of last inspection	16/11/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Child Care Bureau Ltd (CCB Ltd) is a family run, private fostering agency. It has been operating since June 2000. The agency offers a range of placements across a wide geographical area and is based near Pershore in Worcestershire.

There are currently 42 fostering households with 73 children and young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The agency consistently promotes and maintains good outcomes for children and has a clear focus on ensuring a positive experience for them in foster care. They do this through good partnership working with placing authorities to plan children's care and ensure good matching of children to foster families.

The agency works well to minimise placement disruptions or moves and supports foster placements well through creative use of enthusiastic fostering support workers.

Safeguarding arrangements protect children. Placing authorities, foster carers and children all think highly of the agency and feel they get a very good service. The agency consults and involves everyone about developments and day-to-day decisions about care; this is especially creative with children. Children are positive about their foster care and say it is an, 'all round really good' agency.

The leadership of the agency is stable, skilled and they make good plans for improving the service. Staff are well trained and supported. Foster carers like the size of the agency; they get responsive support to meet children's needs and appreciate feeling known and valued.

There are some shortfalls, including one regulatory shortfall. The processes for foster

carer assessment, decision-making and approval are not consistently robust. There has been no impact on the welfare or safety of children from this.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
28 (2011)	give written notice to the foster parent that they propose to terminate or revise terms of the foster parents' approval (a "qualifying determination"), together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the panel and advise that they may make written representation to the provider or seek a review by an independent review panel of the qualifying determination. (Regulation 28 (7))	28/02/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective decision. Specifically, that foster homes provide sufficient space and facilities to reflect the terms of approval, all checks are complete and an appropriate manager signs off assessments as complete before submission to the panel for a recommendation (NMS 13.7)
- ensure written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. Specifically, that they establish panel membership and make clear when non-voting advisors and contributors, such as the agency decision maker, leave the panel meeting (NMS 14.7)
- ensure that no one may foster more than three children unless the foster children are all siblings in relation to each other, or the local authority in whose area the foster carer lives exempts them from the usual fostering limits and informs the foster carer in writing that s/he is exempted; names the children who s/he can foster and makes clear any condition to which the exemption is subject (Volume 4, statutory guidance, paragraph 5.46)
- ensure there is a clear policy which outlines the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed as one of the fostering service provider's approved

foster carers, in the interest of the safety or welfare of children. (NMS 22.8)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children feel part of their foster families, one child said it, 'really feels comfortable, like a real home.' Placing authorities have commented that relationships between foster carers and children are based on trust and respect is reciprocal. Children get the help they need to talk about their feelings and express themselves about events in everyday life. They get advice and sympathetic support to build positive relationships when they see their birth family, where this is part of their care plan. A placing social worker described how foster carers are; 'consistent in talking to the children about their birth family which allows the children to be open and honest about how they are feeling.'

Children have respect and good support for their individual differences, whether this is their ethnicity, learning or physical disability or gender, or for their emotional and behavioural needs. One independent reviewing officer described his satisfaction with one child's care; he said that the placement is meeting needs holistically and that this is rare. Communication with children is good. There are good routes to tell the agency about bigger issues too. They make their views known twice a year in the agency's very child-friendly consultation forms; they can also email the Registered Manager from the agency's developing children's website, as well as find out about what activities are running in the next holidays.

The vast majority of children are doing well in secure educational placements and attendance is very good. Children spoke of help to prepare for exams, additional tuition and educational support from their placing authorities. Young people feel positive about their future. Those who have struggled in education make progress towards positive career choices through practical apprenticeships. Others were happy to be making positive plans for college and working, close to the foster homes. One young person described taking on more personal responsibility as they grow up, and that foster carers, 'loosen the reins', so they can feel more independent.

Children lead healthy lives, eat well and foster carers and the agency's support staff are positive role models who promote healthy leisure in their local communities. Children like the holiday events, outings, activities, and they described the support workers who take them out, as, 'amazing'. They like going on family holidays with their foster carers and described busy active social lives outside school. They enjoy tennis, horse-riding, drama groups, and community activities like scouts and brownies, and are involved in local football teams and army cadets. One young person said they felt, 'really lucky' to be placed with their foster carers.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **good**.

The agency has a clear strategy for the recruitment of people suitable to become foster carers and to meet the needs of the local authorities who use its services. There has been a period of growth and development in advertising for, and screening, applicants. From a high level of initial enquiries, only a few foster carers proceed to assessment and approval. Social work assessors are skilled and use national competency based assessment tools. Assessment and decision making about applicants' suitability to become foster carers is generally good. Foster carers found their assessments very thorough; one said, 'they found out more about me than I knew myself'. However, in a few cases, a faster assessment process has meant that the panel and agency decision maker have not had full information to make an informed recommendation and decision, and they have done this before all checks are complete. The process has not always ensured that foster homes are ready and bedrooms properly equipped. When terms of approval change, the agency does not write to foster carers about this qualifying determination, giving full information about their right to appeal any changes to their approval category.

The agency is able to provide for larger placements, including groups of brothers and sisters and parent and baby placements, and has done this well. However, while the agency has properly requested exemptions from the local authority when more than three unrelated children are in placement, it has not ensured a formal response. These shortfalls have not affected children's care.

The fostering panel provides good analysis about foster carers' suitability. The panel draws on a range of skills and values diversity in its membership. Panel members know about legislation and good practice through regular training and new members have had good inductions. However, minutes sometimes do not make clear panel membership, rather than panel attendance; they do not always record when non-voting advisors and contributors, such as the agency decision maker, leave the meeting.

The agency has improved its processes for matching children to foster families. Placing authorities are pleased with the outcomes of this. Children of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds have care that respects and prioritises their needs, although they may not be placed with a direct match. The agency gathers, and requests, full statutory information about children and also creates good quality internal care plans to supplement this. They have been successful in ensuring that foster carers have proper devolved authority to make everyday decisions about the children in their care. A placing authority described one young person in a long-term placement as very settled and happy with carers: 'She continues to make excellent progress academically and socially.'

Foster carers have a programme of well-planned preparation and post-approval training and a high proportion have completed the nationally recognised induction standards within timescales. This induction process starts during the assessment period so that even foster carers who have not completed mandatory training in child health, child protection and behaviour management, will have addressed these issues in their induction logs before children arrive in placement. Children said the agency provides good foster care and said of foster carers, 'there should be more like them.'

The agency recognises foster carers have different interests and skill levels and provides advanced training about attachment, disability, promoting independence and child protection. The agency cares well for children with challenging health needs and provides enthusiastic, knowledgeable foster carers who undertake training and liaise well with health staff to deliver complex health care. Foster carers also pursue advanced nationally recognised fostering qualifications and promote positive behaviour management. Children say when things go wrong they have conversations with foster carers about things that have happened, rather than punishments. Some talked of being 'grounded' when they break foster family rules, but felt this was fair.

Fostering social workers support foster carers very well and they feel respected and part of the team. They say they get 100 per cent support from the agency and that the agency champions the fostering cause. When children are in crisis, fostering support workers provide additional intervention, either in direct work with children, or with daily tasks like taking children to school and to see their family. This helps to prevent placement breakdown and an increasing number of children have placements that last. The service recognises that fostering involves the whole family and so the service supports the whole family, including foster carers' own children, on holiday activity sessions.

Placing authorities report cooperative working to support children in placement and the agency gives a clear message about different responsibilities of local authority and fostering social workers to avoid confusion. Foster carers advocate on behalf of children with education and to secure good health care, including help for children in distress. Children said they felt they could always talk to their foster carers and 'feel looked after.'

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Foster carers have good information about children's histories and family experiences, in order to plan and deliver safe care and reduce unnecessary risks. The agency is realistic about when it is no longer able to keep children safe and considers this information when matching; they have ended placements when children's behaviour is too risky or challenging to be managed in the foster home. Other children have settled into completely new patterns of ordinary, safer living. They go to school, come home on time, make friends, do not stay out late, take up hobbies and think about positively changing their lives.

Children say there are plenty of adults they trust and who they can talk to if they are worried; one advised other foster children, 'not to keep things bottled up.' They say they feel safe in foster care and placing authorities express no concerns about how the agency protects children. The agency identifies and makes good plans to help children when they are vulnerable to bullying and when there are risks in their behaviour.

Children are involved in discussions about their safety. They learn about how to keep themselves safe on the children's website; this links them directly to external advocacy and helpful agencies for children in time of crisis. Children do not go missing often; those who do this, do it less over time. Foster carers communicate with placing social workers and the police to make sure they understand the reasons why children run off.

The agency has good policy, procedures and practice in dealing with any allegations or safeguarding concerns in conjunction with statutory agencies. On advice from the local area designated officer, the agency considers any quality of care issues after the conclusion of child protection procedures and maintains several records of their conclusions, which they share with foster carers. They encourage improved practice through training and reflective supervision and the panel reviews foster carers who continue with the agency. There is not, however, a clear policy making clear the circumstances in which the agency may decide a foster carer is no longer suitable to continue working for the agency.

There are robust, safe recruitment processes. All adults, foster carers, panel members, consultants and staff are suitable to work with vulnerable children. They make sure foster homes are safe places for children to live by doing unannounced visits and checking health and safety standards in the foster home. Trained foster carers deliver first aid treatment; the Registered Manager closely monitors accidents and medication. These arrangements ensure that children get safe care.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **good**.

The management team has a range of skills and experience in social work and business management and works effectively to meet business needs in a way that keeps children as the central focus. The Registered Manager is actively involved in children's lives and monitors their good outcomes on an individual basis. Systems for governance are well established and the Registered Manager carries out a cycle of monthly reporting to the responsible individual and directors; this identifies issues promptly. The service has recently contributed to an on-going serious case review and at the time of the inspection had reviewed their immediate learning and practice while waiting for its completion.

The agency also carries out cycles of consultations with foster carers and with children that feed into the annual review of the quality of care. The agency values children's views and uses excellent consultation documents, on paper and online, twice a year, using language that children understand. Children get a good response to their issues, whether this is about not wanting to share, décor in bedrooms, or knowledge of their care plans. The Registered Manager has acted on foster carers' suggestions and introduced an additional level of appraisal so that effectively foster carers have two opportunities each year to consider their professional development.

The agency has taken action to meet two previous regulatory and four national

minimum shortfalls. Children now have excellent information on line and in two different children's guide formats for older and younger children with clear guidance about Ofsted's contact details. The procedure in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect is now very clear about what to do in the event of an allegation against managers in the agency; this protects children. Systems to match children with prospective foster carers are much better. Foster carers and placing authorities feel this works well and helps children to put down roots and feel comfortable. Foster carers now have much clearer guidance and training about positive behaviour management and they use de-escalation techniques to manage children's challenging behaviour. This reduces conflict and helps children to feel calmer. Children and foster carers' records are now fully confidential and secure. The agency is also developing its skill base by training staff to promote play therapy with foster carers. These improvements demonstrate an agency focused on providing children with a better service.

Partnership arrangements with placing authorities, the police, health and educational services are effective. Placing authorities described them as very efficient in their responses with timely information about children; another found them considerably more positive in terms of quality and communication. People working for the agency, in whatever capacity, are skilled, competent individuals and they share its ethos, saying, 'it's about improving outcomes for children'. They develop specialisms within their team and are keen to train further. The Registered Manager supports all social work and support staff to maintain professional registrations and through professional supervision. Staff feel valued, well trained and have good technological equipment to enable them to work remotely. People like working for the agency and like the small size. Fostering social workers know about every child's situation and update themselves every week so they know the current situation and are able to talk or support every foster carer in need. This demonstrates the centrality of children's experience to the service.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.