

# Beams Foster Care and Family Service Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Inspection date** 29/02/2016  
**Inspector** Clive Lucas  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype** Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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**Responsible individual** Beryl Sims  
**Date of last inspection** N/A

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned fostering service. It provides a range of placements, including parent and child placements, bridging to adoption and long-term and reunification placements. It provides services for children with disabilities. The service currently has seven sets of foster carers.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency provides good foster placements for children and young people with a range of needs including some with particularly complex needs. The children and young people have their needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Placements are stable and any moves are carefully considered to ensure that they are in children and young people's best interests. This stability enables children and young people to develop a sense of belonging in their foster families and to build positive and beneficial relationships with their carers.

While the agency is still small, they are continuing to recruit carers. They only offer placements for children and young people whose needs they believe they can meet effectively. The assessment process for carers is thorough and is carried out in a timely way, so that potential carers are not lost due to delays. Carers are well supervised to ensure that they provide a high standard of care and to help them find effective ways of working with children and young people.

The responsible individual and registered manager are very involved in the running

of the agency and know its strengths and areas for development. All agency staff work well with the carers, so that they feel included in the team around the child or young person. This is enhanced by good relationships with the placing social workers and schools.

## Areas of 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.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. This relates to having a full employment history. (Regulation 20(3)(c))	20/05/2016

### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that children and their parents understand the nature of records maintained and how to access them. (NMS 26.3)
- Ensure that foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement. (Statutory Guidance Volume 4, paragraph 3.62)
- Ensure that the placement plan provides clarity about what authority the parents have delegated to the local authority, and how the day-to-day parenting tasks will be shared between the foster carer(s) and the local authority. The person(s) with the authority to take a particular decision or give a particular consent must be clearly named on the placement plan and any associated actions (e.g. a requirement for the foster carer to notify the local authority that a particular decision has been made) should be clearly set out. (Statutory Guidance Volume 4, paragraph 3.14)

## Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency plans well and works with the placing social workers to help ensure that children's and young people's moves into foster homes are effective and that they settle quickly. One placing social worker said that everyone had worked hard to help the children settle, and that the placement which started about three weeks previously was going 'really, really well'. They also said that the carer profile provided by the agency was well presented and child friendly, so that it could be shared with the children and young people.

The children and young people feel safe and comfortable living in their foster homes. They feel part of the families that they live in. One young person commented that: 'Living with my foster carer is fantastic because they support me through difficult and challenging times. They have helped with my behaviour and have changed me into a better person. I am achieving well and I love them because they make me feel loved and like part of the family.' One social worker said that the young person who they work with has been able to develop her self-identity since being placed with her foster carer. Although the agency was only registered in April 2014, some carers have transferred from other agencies with children and young people in placement. Some of these placements are long-standing and continue to provide stability for the children and young people. In one case, the young person is planning to remain with his carers after his 18th birthday so that they can continue to provide consistency and support for him. Carers and the agency show a high level of commitment to the children and young people so that they do not have unnecessary moves.

The children's and young people's views are listened to and when it is appropriate they are acted upon. This includes major issues such as decisions about their placements and more everyday issues such as the interests that they wish to pursue. This helps children and young people to feel part of the families that they live in and to have an influence on their care. There are children's guides to provide the children and young people with information about being in foster care with Beams. These are available in different formats for younger and older ages, so that they are accessible to more children and young people. Following consultation with the young people, the agency is also working on a version for older teenagers. The children and young people are not given information about their rights to read their fostering records and so they may not all know that they can do this.

The children and young people make good progress in their education. Carers work closely with schools and attend education meetings to ensure that the children's and young people's educational needs can be met. For one young person, this involved the carer liaising with the school so that she could support the young person in their learning and also arranging additional tutoring to help them to make progress in areas which were important to them. A representative from a school said that carers are interested in the children's and young people's educations. The children's and young people's health needs are also met very well. Carers arrange routine health appointments. They also work closely with health professionals to help them to

understand and meet specific health needs such as epilepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The agency itself arranges for some of the young people to have therapeutic input, such as life journey work.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency offers placements to some children and young people with complex needs. In one case, the level of complexity was not evident at the point of placement, but was subsequently found to be much higher than realised. The agency has worked with the placing social worker and the carers to find ways of supporting these additional needs so that the young person has not had to move, but continues to have his needs met. His social worker said that the carers are knowledgeable of his health needs, he is fond of them both and is happy in his placement. Respite care is provided for some young people, but only when it is in their best interests.

Foster carers say that there is a clear focus on the needs of the children and young people through their assessment and training and that the agency is clear about what it expects of carers. The agency has high expectations for children and young people and is child-focused. These clear expectations and the focus on the children and young people help to ensure that their needs are met well. One carer said that their assessment was a good balance of the agency wanting to recruit carers and making sure that they were suitable. They felt that it was done very professionally. There is regular and detailed supervision of the carers by agency staff, which helps them to look at different ways of working with the children and young people. When necessary, additional meetings are held with the carers and social workers to look at and to review the plans for how the carers work with and look after the children and young people. This helps to keep the plans and work relevant and effective. Delegated authority is discussed at placement planning meetings. These meetings are recorded by the local authority on their designated forms. However, these are not always completed in a way which provides sufficient clarity to prevent delays in making decisions about the children and young people.

The carers feel very well supported. They like working for a small agency, which they describe as 'hands on'. They know that they have 24-hour support. One carer said that while the agency provided them with good support, it was clear that the children and young people are the main priority. The carers feel that the training they take part in is helpful and effective. One set of carers are working towards their training and development standards. All other carers have completed these standards. Overall, carers are well supported and trained to provide good levels of care.

The carers work well with the parents to ensure that there is good sharing of information about the children and young people. This helps to ensure that the carers have the knowledge to help them to meet individualised needs. They also support contact between the children and young people and their families, so that important links and relationships are not lost. The carers are provided with guidance on managing the children's and young people's medication and keep records which

are regularly checked by the agency. However, these records do not always differentiate between a child or young person being offered but refusing medication and them taking it. For some significant conditions, it is important that there is a clear record of when medication was missed, to inform the future health plans of children and young people and to find ways of helping the children and young people to understand the significance of their medication.

The foster panel has an experienced chair and a good range of knowledge, skills and experience among its members. Due to the size of the agency and the time that it has been registered, the panel is still quite 'young'. In the early days, they identified an issue with an assessment. The agency responded effectively to this issue and this has improved the quality of future assessments. The view of panel members is that assessments are now of a good quality. They are comprehensive and evaluative to inform the discussion at panel and the decisions on approval of carers. This helps to ensure that appropriate decisions are made which promote good care and safeguard the children and young people. There is good matching of the children and young people with foster carers, which leads to more stable placements and better outcomes for the children and young people. The carers are involved in decisions over placements and are not put under any pressure to accept placements that they feel are not appropriate. Commissioners say that the agency provides a good service and their relationship is working well.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The children and young people placed with this agency show very low levels of risk-taking behaviour. When there have been concerns over children or young people going missing or becoming involved in substance misuse, the agency has responded appropriately and worked with other agencies to help formulate appropriate responses and to reduce risk. A placing authority said that the responses of the agency in dealing with risk-taking behaviours have been very proactive. There is a joined-up approach to helping the children and young people to keep safe in their use of the internet and social media. This includes written guidance and training for carers and discussion during their supervisions.

The children and young people feel safe in their placements and know how to complain and say that they would be able to speak to their carers. One young person said: 'I like living with my foster carers because they make me feel like part of the family. I feel safe inside and outside of the house... they make me feel cared for and have given me a safe house to live in.' The carers help the children and young people to take age-appropriate risks so that they can develop their independence and understand how to keep themselves safe. Some young people have begun to go out shopping with their friends, have taken part in activities such as theatre groups, and use public transport. These are valuable everyday experiences for the young people, which add normality to their lives and development.

The agency has a strong focus on keeping the children and young people safe. Any

concerns are quickly and openly addressed with the carers so that any necessary action can be taken. The carers are quick to pass on areas of concern to the agency and placing authority. Although there was an omission in the checks on an adult household member during the early days of the agency, this was identified. There has since been a rigorous approach to ensuring that appropriate checks are undertaken on all household members. There are recruitment checks for the staff working in the agency, but in one case a full employment history was not provided. This can limit the overall effectiveness of the recruitment process. The staff and carers know about raising concerns and whistleblowing. They have confidence that such issues would be taken seriously. Overall, the focus on safeguarding and the open culture within the agency help to keep the children and young people safe.

The agency undertakes regular unannounced visits to foster carers as part of their supervision and monitoring of placements. On these visits, they see the children's and young people's bedrooms and speak to them alone. This provides a good safeguard for the children and young people. The placement plans, risk assessments and safe care plans identify any abuse or neglect and what the carers will need to do to help keep the child or young person safe and to support them. The agency has reviewed its safeguarding policy with an external professional to ensure that it is effective.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The registered manager and responsible individual are both qualified and experienced social workers and managers. The registered manager is working towards her level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management. They have the skills and experience required to carry on the agency well. The agency is growing at a slow pace. This is consistent with their ethos of being a small agency and is something that the carers appreciate.

The registered manager and the responsible individual are both very involved in the running of the agency. They know the carers and the children and young people well. They have a comprehensive and effective system for monitoring the quality of care and practice in the agency. They get views from the children and young people, the carers and placing authorities, and make changes to improve the quality of care. For example, following feedback from prospective carers who attended the panel, the agency has provided a short profile on panel members for the carers to read in advance. The placing authority says that when it has raised issues the agency has responded to them as they would have hoped. Staff from the placing authority say that there are good working relationships with the agency and describe 'joined-up working'. They also say that the agency is tenacious and will challenge the local authority if they feel that they should be doing more or different things for the children and young people. The local authority says that they are pleased to have placements with the agency. A school representative also spoke about the good relationships that they have with the agency and the high quality of the managers, staff and carers. These relationships help to provide consistent work and to meet the

needs of the children and young people well.

The registered manager and responsible individual ensure that the children and young people have opportunities to take part in enjoyable activities and community groups. This includes regular activities such as after school clubs and theatre groups. In addition, they themselves take the children and young people out on regular activities, which gives them the opportunity to get to know the children and young people as well as to listen to their views. There have not been any complaints about the agency.

The agency staff, including the registered manager, receive appropriate training and supervision to help them to develop their knowledge and to review how they work with the foster carers, children and young people. This helps to ensure a high standard of practice.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.