

# Foster Care Associates Thames Valley

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC047677
<b>Inspection date</b>	14/11/2016
<b>Inspector</b>	Rosie Dancer Lucy Chapman
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Foster Care Associates, Hale Court, Hale Road, Wendover, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP22 6NJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 628300
<b>Email</b>	ian.langley@thefca.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Foster Care Associates Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Ian Langley
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Mark Costello
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	30/11/2015

---

© Crown copyright 2017

Website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Foster Care Associates, Thames Valley region, is a local branch of a well-established national organisation offering a comprehensive range of fostering placements to placing local authorities. The Thames Valley branch has its operational headquarters in Wendover, Buckinghamshire, and offices in Reading and Stanmore. The branch offers emergency, short and longer placements, with a particular focus on more-difficult-to-place children and young people for whom an enhanced package of care, based on a team parenting model, is available. The agency currently supports 119 fostering households that are providing care for 125 children and young people.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children 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: **Requires improvement**

The recruitment of foster carers is centrally managed. The strategy is effective in ensuring that there is sufficient diversity among the pool of carers to meet children's and young people's diverse needs. Not all foster carers receive information in writing about a child or young person being placed with them. This does not support them to care effectively for them from the moment when they start to live with them.

---

There has been no training for social workers in dealing with cases of female genital mutilation and, as a result, they are not confident about how to report suspected cases. Training for social workers in helping carers support children and young people in their education has not been underpinned by an up to date education policy. Only 11 foster carers have attended the most recent training relating to supporting children and young people's educational progress. Therefore, while there are some good pieces of work with children and young people in supporting their education this has been reliant on individual social workers and carers' confidence and competence in this area of children's lives. Other training that social workers have taken part in, such as working with carers effectively has helped them develop their practice.

There is backlog of foster carers who have not completed mandatory training, including training relating to safeguarding matters. This compromises some foster carers' ability to recognise safeguarding risks and take appropriate action.

There has been a lack of effective challenge to those local authorities that have not provided young people who have been missing independent return home interviews. This results in missed opportunities for young people to discuss any issues that they have, so that they can be supported to minimise their 'missing' episodes.

The statement of purpose is comprehensively written, but it has not been provided to HMCI.

The recruitment of staff effectively seeks to ensure that staff are suitable people to work with children and young people, but the recruitment of panel members is not as vigorously undertaken.

Management oversight of the work of the agency is hindered by poor systems for data collection and recording. This has been recognised by the organisation and a new system is to be introduced imminently. The registered manager monitors the quality of the service and seeks the views of others in his evaluation. He produces a report at the required frequency but had not provided HMCI with a copy. The registered manager deals with complaints effectively, but in one instance there were shortfalls in the information recorded.

This agency provides care that, in the vast majority of cases, impacts positively on children's and young people's lives. Most children's and young people's experience of foster care is positive, and the vast majority live happily in stable households and make good progress in their lives. Children and young people develop positive, trusting relationships with their foster carers, who listen to them and show them love

and affection. Children and young people grow to feel part of the family. Foster carers are aware of the impact that their child's past adverse experiences has had on their emotional well-being and behaviour, and support them to overcome their difficulties.

The quality of support to foster placements and foster carers has improved since the last inspection. Social workers are more confident in providing good-quality supervision to foster carers and support them to be more reflective. Foster carers feel that they are part of the professional team working with the child or young person, and that their opinions are valued.

The arrangements for ensuring the safety and well-being of children and young people have also improved. The working relationships with safeguarding and other agencies and professionals have developed well.

The registered manager has worked tirelessly to improve the care provided to the children and young people. He has uncovered and addressed some inadequate practice that occurred prior to his employment, and this has led to improvements in safeguarding practice. He has also developed many other areas of practice. For example, the opportunities for children and young people to influence the development of the agency have improved vastly.

There has been a significant turnover of staff and managers. At the time of the inspection, not all management posts had been filled. This shortfall of management support has limited the registered manager's time and ability to progress the agency as far as he had planned to. While the improvements that have been made need time to become embedded, there is now a strong base for the agency to develop further.

The arrangements for and the quality of the panel have improved significantly upon the appointment of a new chair. The panel is undertaking its quality assurance function effectively, and this is supporting the development of good practice.

## 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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children and young people placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that there is a clear plan to ensure that all foster carers have completed all mandatory and other training the agency requires within reasonable timescales.</p>	17/05/2017
<p>The registered person must ensure that:</p> <p>The welfare of children and young people is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a)(b)(i)(ii))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to challenging effectively local authorities that do not arrange timely independent return interviews.</p>	17/05/2017
<p>The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>This paragraph applies to any person who is employed, other than by the fostering service provider, in a position in which that person may in the course of their duties have regular contact with children placed by the fostering service.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person: is of integrity and good character, has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary</p>	17/05/2017

for the work they are to perform, is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in schedule 1. (Regulation 20(1)(a)(b)(2)(3)(a)(b)(c))	
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the chief inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35(1)(2)(3))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to ensuring that a copy of the review report is provided to the chief inspector.</p>	17/05/2017
The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the chief inspector. (Regulation 3(2))	17/05/2017
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training. (Regulation 21(4))</p> <p>This is with specific reference to developing a clear plan for providing staff with ongoing training in: supporting children and young people in education; recognising and responding to female genital mutilation within reasonable timescales.</p>	17/05/2017

## Recommendations

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

- Prior to the placement of each child, ensure the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. (Fostering services: national minimum standards 15.2)
- Ensure that the IT and communication systems in place are efficient, robust and effective. (Fostering services: national minimum standards 27.1)

- Appropriately recognise and acknowledge that foster carers have a challenging and key role to play within a foster care service. They need skill, knowledge, expertise, self-awareness, commitment and the ability to work as part of a team, providing a high-quality, effective service to vulnerable children. To undertake this role successfully, it is essential that their contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people looked after is appropriately recognised and acknowledged, their status respected and their levels of authority clearly defined so that they can give children and young people in their care a full experience of family life, safeguard them and help them to grow and reach their potential. In particular, adopt the foster carers' charter. (Children and Young People Act 1989, Guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering services, page 11, paragraph 2.4)
- Ensure that current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Keep records of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. Ensure these records are reviewed regularly so that the service's practice is improved, when necessary. (Fostering services: national minimum standards 21.11)
- Fostering services must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster carers (regulation 16 and standard 8). While this duty does not apply in respect of children in short-break care, foster carers should be mindful of the need to support parents in this task. Fostering services must have written education policies which set out how foster carers are supported to help to ensure that children reach their full educational potential throughout their childhood and the transition into adulthood. (Children and Young People Act 1989, Guidance and regulations volume 4: Fostering services, page 30 3.103)



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

Judgement **Good**  
outcome:

Children and young people settle well into their foster homes. When possible, they are given helpful information about their new foster carers that includes the views of other children who have lived with them. This takes away some of their uncertainty about where they will be and who will be caring for them. A young person who has recently moved in with foster carers said: 'It feels like I have lived there for years.'

Most children and young people progress well. This is a result of the foster carers and social workers implementing the individual plan for each individual and ensuring that plans are reviewed when their needs change. Children and young people who are of an appropriate age and level of understanding know how they will be looked after. They understand their care plan and the expectations of them, such as the rules and boundaries. When there are any changes to their care, foster carers spend time with them explaining what these are.

Children and young people develop strong relationships with their foster carers and feel safe in the nurturing environments that they live in. Foster homes visited were homely environments. Young people were at ease in their home, and one young person said that he loved living with his foster carers. Children and young people know that their foster carers like them and see them as a valued member of the family. They feel that they belong with their foster carers. Social workers spoke about the dedication of the foster carers and the good progress that their child has made.

Some children's and young people's emotional needs mean that they behave in a disruptive way. Foster carers had a clear understanding about how their child's behaviour stems from their emotional turmoil. They accept them for who they are and work with them help them develop more appropriate ways of dealing with their anguish.

Unless there is a safeguarding need, the vast majority of children and young people stay with their foster family for as long as they need to. There is now a far more dynamic approach taken to supporting families that may be experiencing difficulties. This means that problems are identified sooner and are addressed effectively, and placements are stabilised.

---

Children's and young people's emotional health improves due to the support available to them. For example, therapy consultation and therapeutic input can be provided by an in-house therapy service, when required. During the consultation, foster carers talk about the difficulties that they face. Strategies are then discussed and agreed, to support the family to overcome its difficulties. In addition, foster carers work effectively with external agencies and professionals to ensure that their child or young person has the services that they need to develop to reach their potential. Children and young people also enjoy time spent with the agency support workers, whose role is to befriend and support children and young people. They aid their learning about issues such as friendship choices, budgeting and understanding their life story.

The number of complaints from children and young people are low. There has only been one complaint since the last inspection. This was dealt with in an efficient and timely way. Children and young people know how to contact someone who can help them with any issues that are worrying them. For example, the young person who had complained used the services of an advocate.

There have been significant developments in children's and young people's participation. They are far more involved in shaping the development of the agency. For example, children and young people identified that the complaints system was not something that they felt was easy for them to use. A 'have my say' card has been designed by and produced for children and young people who may want to complain. A participation fun day has been held. During this event, feedback from the young people was gained through a coconut shy, using consultation questions in the coconuts. Young people's forums have also been held over the course of the year, and the development of a mentoring course is being explored by the agency.

Children and young people are learning to take more responsibility for their behaviour. The care that they are provided with is helping them to reduce unacceptable behaviour, and some have learned to manage their anger more effectively. The agency staff and carers work with the local authority to reduce risks to children and young people. For example, the agency and foster carers worked closely with the placing authority for a young person who self-harmed, and this ensured that she had the support that she needed to keep safe.

Children and young people are physically healthy. They are registered with routine health services and are supported to attend routine check-up appointments. More specialist support is accessed, when required, and carers work closely with health professionals. The agency has provided carers with bespoke training to meet a

specific child's very complex physical health needs. Children and young people learn about the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and what this entails. For example, healthy eating and exercise are promoted in foster homes and the development of good personal hygiene routines is supported.

Education attendance and achievement in the individual cases sampled showed that these children and young people were attending school regularly and were being supported in their learning by their foster carers' help with their homework. There was no data available in relation to children's and young people's attendance or attainment to enable inspectors fully to evaluate the level of success of the service in supporting children's and young people's education attendance and attainment.

Personal education plans underpin the ongoing support of children's and young people's education. Examples were seen of additional tuition being provided to children and young people who needed it. The agency has made links with a scheme run by a national football club, focused on encouraging and supporting young people into education, training or employment. Two young people from the agency have been referred to take part in this.

Children and young people are engaged in a good range of activities. As in any family, they are encouraged and supported in their membership of various clubs, take part in team activities and events, and generally pursue their interests. The agency also provides various activities and groups that enable children and young people who are fostered to forge relationships with other fostered children. The agency has introduced boys' and girls' clubs. Young people talked about how they enjoy these. One young person said that she enjoyed a baking session at the girls' group and another said that she liked having the chance to talk to other fostered young people. There are annual fun days and trips to outdoor adventure activity parks. There is also a national event, an annual singing day, to which children and young people who are fostered by the agency are invited from across the country. The agency also has access to some cottages in Wales for foster families to go and spend a few days with each other.

Children's and young people's diverse needs are recognised as important, and carers work hard to ensure that these needs are fulfilled. For example, one foster carer took a young person to visit her country of origin. This helped her to understand better her birth culture, and the customs and traditions of the country. While children and young people integrate well into their foster family, they are supported effectively to develop or maintain their relationships with family and other people significant to them. Foster carers understand the impact that seeing family can have on their child's or young person's emotional well-being. Foster

carers support their child or young person to make sense of their feelings about this. When children and young people do not live with their brothers and sisters, they are supported to keep in touch, when this is in their best interests. This includes them having sleep-overs at the foster home, when it is appropriate.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The recruitment of potential foster carers is managed centrally. The information about this region's needs are fed into the national strategy. This ensures that foster carers are recruited who are likely to be able to meet the diverse needs of young people in this locality.

Prospective foster carers undergo an in-depth assessment that explores their suitability to parent a child who has complex needs. The preparation of foster carers focuses on the complex and diverse needs that the children and young people needing a foster placement are likely to have.

Overall, the service has improved its matching arrangements and is far more challenging of local authorities when information is either missing or not of a good quality. This makes sure that children and young people needing a foster placement are considered for a specific family in a meaningful way.

Foster carers are not always clear about the needs of a child or young person whom they have been asked to care for, as this information is not routinely shared with them in writing. This limits foster carers' ability to anticipate problems and provide appropriate care and assistance to the child or young person from the time when they move in.

Foster families showed a good understanding about how important it is to ensure that children and young people feel that they belong to and are part of the family. Some good examples were seen of this having been achieved. For example, a young person said: 'I already feel part of the family.' Another said: 'They (foster carers) are my mum and dad.'

Foster carers who offer parent and child placements demonstrated a good understanding about their role in this work. For example, in one case the foster carers took a non-judgemental and empathetic approach to a parent who was

struggling. They supported her to improve her emotional health and parenting skills. The work that they carried out with her led to the mother and baby moving into their own accommodation.

The arrangements for respite care have improved. Matching a child or young person with respite carers is undertaken with due rigour, in the same way as a mainstream care placement is planned. Respite care is in children's and young people's interests, and some young people who have series of respite stays remain with the same respite carers at each stay.

Foster carers have a good understanding of their role in their child's or young person's life and understand how they fit into the professional network around them. They are actively involved in planning for the child or young person, and in general feel that they are seen as the 'expert' in the child or young person. Clear delegated authority plans mean that foster carers can make appropriate decisions about children's or young people's day-to-day lives and that they do not have to wait for permission from social workers about issues such as whether they can stay overnight with a friend.

There have been a number of changes in the personnel working for the agency and, inevitably, this has caused some disruption and uncertainty for foster carers. Some foster carers have not felt able to adapt to the new ways of working and have left the agency.

Current foster carers report that they have professional and supportive relationships with their social worker. One said that her worker had been 'excellent', and generally foster carers value the support provided by their worker. Support groups and activities were cited by foster carers as being useful to help them to cope with the demands that the fostering task brings. Some foster carers described the contrast between the current support groups and previous arrangements. One said that the groups are now 'a time of sharing and support', and another said: 'We had fun. It was lovely. It was like a support group, but without the whingeing.' Foster carers value peer support from each other.

Foster carers say that the quality of training has improved. They said that it is more interesting and engaging. However, a historic lack of take-up of training by some foster carers has resulted in very low levels of mandatory and additional training having been undertaken. Some foster carers who have been approved for in excess of 12 months, some well in excess, have not completed the required training or the development standards. This does not ensure that foster carers are at all times confident and competent in promoting children's and young people's well-being and

safety. The recording of training is muddled and inaccurate, so it is difficult to establish who has done what training. While there is a training plan for 2017, the spaces available are not sufficient for all to attend, so there is a danger that the situation will not improve over the coming year.

The arrangements for the fostering panel have improved vastly. There is a new panel chair, and the panel is made up of people from a range of diverse backgrounds and skills. Collectively, the panel members have the knowledge and expertise to make informed recommendations about the suitability of applicants and the continued suitability of current carers. The panel's and decision maker's careful consideration of applicants' suitability leads to placements for children and young people that promote their safety, security and stability. When hearing foster carer reviews, the panel has insisted that children's and young people's views about the foster carer are included in the reports. Under the new panel chair, the shortfalls in training for foster carers have been highlighted as a concern.

There are good working relationships between the agency and local authority social workers, and this includes effective working when reviewing care plans. The team parenting meetings hosted by the agency enable good communication between all professionals and ensure that all are working together in the best interests of the child.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement **Requires improvement**  
outcome:

A significant number of foster carers have not completed mandatory and other training relating to safeguarding children. This is training that the agency expects them to have completed within the first 12 months of their approval. Areas of shortfall include safeguarding, safer care, first aid, multi-agency public protection arrangements, e-safety and dealing with cases or suspected cases of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. The lack of attention to ensuring that all foster carers work in this area is underpinned by formal training is of concern.

Foster carers have a good understanding about how abuse and neglect have impacted on the child or young person whom they care for. They understand how this can manifest in their behaviour. They are sensitive to children's and young people's needs in this area. Foster carers know how to deal with disclosures made by a child or young person in relation to past or current abuse. Foster carers also

advocate for their child or young person when bullying or discrimination is affecting them. Safeguarding is discussed in supervision with foster carers, and this goes towards raising their awareness of safeguarding issues relevant to the child or young person whom they are caring for. Likewise, the arrangements for unannounced visits to foster carers provide a level of quality assurance in monitoring the safety of households. While there is a backlog of unannounced visits, all outstanding visits are booked in.

Since the last inspection, there has been a far more planned approach taken to supporting children or young people who go missing. A comprehensive policy and procedure has been developed in conjunction with the police. Social workers and foster carers understand the revised arrangements and have begun to implement the local protocols. They have an understanding about what may cause a child or young person to go missing, and take some action to minimise risks and reduce the incidents. However, a shortfall in a significant number of cases in ensuring that children and young people are offered a return home interview means that there are missed opportunities to support the child in reducing or eliminating incidents of missing. Some carers have discussed with children and young people what would happen should they be missing, so they understand better the plan to protect them.

Risks to children and young people are minimised through a sound approach to risk assessment. Children's and young people's safety is underpinned by the use of safe caring plans. These are updated as needs change and risks increase. Likewise, as children and young people grow and develop skills that indicate that they are ready to manage a situation with less support, the plans are amended to reflect this.

Children and young people know how to raise issues that are worrying them and can identify someone whom they can talk to. The agency is developing relationships with a representative of a national organisation that provides advocacy to children and young people to give them a further means of independent support.

Children and young people have been involved in discussions about safety through the boys' and girls' groups. The discussions with children and young people in these groups enable them to make informed decisions about risk taking, for example internet use and social networking. Allegations against or suspicion of harm to a child or young person are referred appropriately to local authority designated officers in a timely way. The registered manager works effectively with safeguarding agencies to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded. While staff have a good overall awareness of safeguarding issues and how to deal with them, they were not aware of how to respond to incidents of potential or actual female genital mutilation. While there is a policy on this, staff were not



aware of it.

All vetting of social work staff working for the agency is thorough and complies with statutory requirements. However, the vetting of panel members is not vigorous. There had been a failure to obtain a full employment history so that it could be identified if there were any gaps that needed exploring.

## Leadership and management

Judgement **Requires improvement**  
outcome:

The statement of purpose is clearly written, sets out the aims and objectives of the agency and underpins its work. The statement had not been provided to Ofsted, but this was addressed during the inspection. The children's guides, one for the older and one for the younger age range, are also clear and easily understood, and young people have been involved in their development.

The current registered manager of the agency was new in post at the time of the last inspection. Subsequently, in April 2016, he was registered with Ofsted through demonstrating that he is suitability qualified and experienced to do so.

The level of improvement that the registered manager has achieved since the last inspection is impressive. He has developed highly effective working relationships with local authority commissioners, one of whom said that he was seen as 'a safe pair of hands'. Likewise, relationships with local authority designated officers and social workers have developed very well. A foster carer said that since the registered manager has been in post, the agency 'has moved forward immensely'. Foster carers feel that the registered manager listens to them. His initial focus on uncovering and addressing poor and, in some instances, dangerous practice has impacted positively on children's and young people's safety, well-being and progress. Generally, confidence has been restored in the agency.

Most requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed. Those that have not relate to the recruitment of non-social work personnel and the quality of record keeping when adults make a complaint.

Many areas of the work have been incredibly hard to evaluate, due to the poor systems for data collection. The registered manager has been severely limited in his ability to carry out the expected monitoring tasks effectively. This is because data,



for example about missing from care, educational attendance/achievement and staff/carer training, is either not readily available or inaccurate. Monitoring has relied on his painstaking efforts to create data manually or his reliance on social workers telling him about incidents of concern, so that risk management strategies can be developed and implemented. This situation is not sustainable. The organisation has recognised these and other problems with the electronic system, and plans to introduce a new system in the New Year.

The registered manager produced an insightful annual report in March 2016 which he has used in the development of the agency. This report has not provided to HMCI in a timely way.

There has been a significant turnover of staff and managers since the last inspection, and this has undoubtedly impacted on the remaining staff, foster carers and children. It is commendable how the registered manager has managed the changes in personnel, and how he has created a culture of accountability and child focus. A social worker said: 'We feel more accountable for our practice. We are challenged more.' The social workers felt that this was positive and that they have been empowered to challenge foster carers when required. One social worker said: 'I have seen a real change now. They (the foster carers) are coming on board.' Social work staff also feel better supported in their roles through supervision and day-to-day contact with managers who listen to them and encourage them.

Foster carers speak positively about how the agency is developing. One said, 'I feel the improvement. There is more direction.' Another described how relationships between foster carers and social workers are more 'professional'. There were also comments from foster carers about the increase in social workers' challenges to them. Some said that this was unnerving to start with, but that they feel it has helped them to be more reflective about how they care for their children and deal with difficulties.

The improvements in the staffing and management of the agency are embedding well, and the registered manager has a clear view about where further developments are needed. There have been some innovative developments, especially in the area of participation. Children and young people are shaping the development of services, and the focus is firmly on them and what they want.

The education policy was not in line with national guidance on promoting the education of children looked after. The organisation had identified this at the beginning of 2016 but had not acted on its own recommendations. Therefore subsequent training in supporting children and young people in their education has

not been underpinned by a clear policy. Practice in this area has largely relied on individual social workers' and carers' competence, knowledge and confidence to challenge local authorities when education is not meeting a child's or young person's needs.

Social workers' learning and development needs have been met well in other areas. For example, they have attended bespoke training delivered by a professor of social work. Social workers reported how this training had helped them to develop their practice. One social worker said: 'When I walk into a house (foster home), I am thinking differently and thinking more reflectively.' Another social worker said: 'I am more confident in my practice.'

The agency has not yet adopted a foster carers' charter, although it is planned that this will be implemented after consultation with foster carers. Complaints and concerns from adults are dealt with effectively by the manager. Not all of the records maintained include full details of the investigation of a complaint, its outcome and the actions taken.

All notifiable events are completed. The registered manager takes appropriate follow-up action to secure children's and young people's safety.

## 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.