

Foster Care Associates East Midlands

Foster Care Associates

Core Assets, 2a Cyrus Way, Peterborough PE7 8HP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates (FCA) is an independent fostering agency. It is a national organisation and has been operating since 1994. FCA East Midlands is based in Peterborough. It offers a range of placements, including short-term, long-term and permanent placements, along with sibling placements, complex placements, emergency placements and placements for unaccompanied/sanctuary-seeking young people. Therapists, education staff and support services staff provide different types of support to these placements. The service currently has 16 approved carers in nine households, providing placements for 12 children.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children have good relationships with their carers.
- The carers welcome the children into their homes.
- Children placed with this service make progress in areas such as education and health.
- The carers provide consistency and routines for children.
- There are support services, such as education and therapy, available from the wider organisation.
- The children take part in a wide range of activities, including fun family activities.
- The service consults the children very well.
- The carers know and understand children's needs.
- There is training and guidance to help the carers to respond effectively if children go missing.
- Effective monitoring of the service leads to improvement.
- The service works effectively with other agencies.
- The service meets the children's needs, including those related to religion and culture.
- The children know that they can see their records.
- The carers keep records which will help children to understand their childhoods if they choose to read them in the future.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- While there are sound processes in place for training foster carers, some training is not as timely as it could be.
- Reviews of the quality of care do not include the views of placing authorities, so some helpful feedback may not be included in the reviews.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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
The registered person's system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency must provide for consultation with the children's placing authorities. (Regulation 35(3))	29/12/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This relates to the timeliness of training and in particular what training should be provided before any children are placed or early in the placement. (National Minimum Standards, 20.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This service was registered in July 2016 to provide a more localised service for foster carers. It covers a central area that was previously covered by two other registrations within the same organisation. Some carers have transferred from the other registrations and the plan is that more will do so. In addition, some new carers have been recruited. The process of transferring carers is not being rushed and, although this service is still quite small, this has allowed the registered manager and staff to develop good relationships with the carers and children.

The children build good relationships with their foster carers, who care about them and work to keep them safe. A placing social worker said that the carers were welcoming when the child moved in and said that the carers are child centred, fair and understanding. Although there are only 12 children placed with the service and most have only been placed with it for a short time, they are making progress. Those who have transferred into the agency are maintaining their progress. A placing social worker spoke of a school noticing an immediate improvement in behaviour for one child. Another social worker said that their child's placement is going remarkably well. The carers have provided routine and consistency, which the child has responded to well.

The carers support children in their education in ways such as helping with homework and reading to them. The service has an education officer who it can use to support children and carers. Some children are getting individual support to help them to catch up with their education. The carers register children with health services to help to ensure that their health needs are identified and met. If children have specific health needs, these are addressed in their plans. The service has a therapist who can provide support for carers and supervising social workers, to help them to meet children's emotional needs more effectively.

The children are able to take part in a wide range of activities. These include family-based activities such as helping with cooking in the home, learning to ride bikes, taking part in family gatherings and parties, and trips to beaches, zoos and funfairs. The children take part in community-based activities such as gymnastics clubs and football groups. This all helps children to feel part of the family, develop interests, enjoy themselves and improve their self-esteem. The service organises events for the children. Following feedback from children, these events are part consultation and part fun-based activities. The service has responded to children's feedback by providing some activities that are aimed at older children during these events. The service places a high value on consultation with children. The service has a very child-centred participation worker. Children have been able to influence the contents of the welcome pack and come up with questions for the fostering panel to ask prospective carers. The carers listen to children's views and worries about contact so that they can help to ensure that contact is a positive experience for the children.

None of the children are old enough to be preparing for independence, but children

do learn age-appropriate independence skills, such as personal care, that will help them when they are older.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The children say that they feel safe in their foster placements. One child commented, 'I have no worries in my placement. I have lived here for three months and I like it. They [the carers] are nice to me. I get a lot of opportunities to go swimming, or ice skating.' Placing social workers report that they have no concerns about the safe care of children. They comment positively on how the children have settled and made progress in their placements. A review of the children's case files shows that the children's needs are well known and understood by carers. The carers are working proactively with other professionals to keep the children safe. The files include good-quality risk assessments, which are shared with carers. The children's safe-care plans include these evaluations. This means that the carers are working with the most up-to-date information to support their care of the children, and that they are well informed about any risks and how to reduce them.

Children rarely go missing from their foster placements. If children do go missing, there is a well-defined missing-from-home protocol for the carers to follow. This helps carers to work with other agencies to enable children to return promptly. There has been good partnership work with the police, who have attended a meeting with the carers. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the carers' role in liaising with the police. The carers' training supports their understanding of the risks for children who are missing from home. The induction training includes information on the importance of internet safety, to help the carers to protect children from online risks. There have not been any restraints since this provider was registered in July 2016. There is online physical intervention training and support for carers if they need to use these techniques. If carers need more formal development of these skills, then face-to-face training is provided.

The carers are encouraged to complete child-centred weekly records. These notes provide the children with positive feedback about how they have managed their own behaviour. They also celebrate the children's achievements. Other records seen during the inspection identify that foster carers are helping children to understand the impact of negative behaviour. For example, carers help the children to understand how their conduct in school may have a detrimental effect on their educational progress.

The provider operates a safe-recruitment process for its staff, foster panel members and foster carers. Background checks are done and views from referees are taken before the provider starts foster carer assessments. These opinions are included in the evaluation process. Senior managers ensure that any issues in the reports are considered thoroughly. This is achieved by reviewing the judgements with the social workers ahead of completion. The provider's quality assurance process highlights aspects of the assessment which may need attention before it is presented at panel. This process also identifies any themes or practice issues for the agency to consider, to develop its working practices further.

The agency ensures that health and safety checks of carers' homes are completed before children are placed there. Supervising social workers also undertake unannounced visits to carers to help ensure that children are being looked after safely. Positive monitoring of the carers through regular supervision and appraisal is effective. The agency took appropriate action to manage an issue regarding a new partner for a carer which came to light through this process.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This relatively new service is growing at a steady pace. There is a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager in post who is child centred and has high aspirations for children. There are a suitable number of staff, including specialist staff, who the service can call on from the wider organisation. The manager and staff support carers to ensure that children can make progress from their starting points.

There are effective systems in place to help the registered manager and senior managers to monitor the service. Through these systems, areas for improvement are identified and implemented. These areas include recruitment to the foster panel so that it is a more diverse group and recognition of the fact that when carers transfer into this service as a couple, in some cases one of the couple will not have completed sufficient training. Being able to identify and address areas for development is an important factor in providing consistently good services for children. The registered manager has undertaken a review of the quality of care, which is helpful, but it has not included the views of placing authorities. Consequently, the review is not based on as wide a range of evidence and opinions as it could be and this could limit its effectiveness.

Supervising social workers are able to develop by taking part in regular and effective supervision and attending training. They have appropriate inductions to help them to understand and begin their roles. They have their performance reviewed at the end of their probationary periods and through annual appraisals. This supportive environment helps to ensure that staff are working effectively to develop good relationships with carers and encourage children's progress. The carers also receive regular supervision to help them to reflect on how they are caring for the children. They have personal development plans to identify their training needs. There are a good range of training opportunities for carers, some of which are designated as mandatory and have to be completed within a year of each carer's approval. However, this includes areas such as first aid, which carers may need to be trained in before the set deadline. While training and supervision of carers helps them to provide good placements for children, the potential delay in some of the mandatory training can limit this to a degree. Overall, the service is good at encouraging and recognising the work and achievements of the children, carers and staff.

The service works effectively with other agencies to help to ensure that children's needs can be met. This includes work with the police and with education providers. There is a clear focus on meeting children's needs through promoting equality and diversity. The service has a diverse range of carers. One child said that they were

able to follow their religion because of the carers with whom they were placed.

Carers write weekly reports about the children's progress and experiences. These reports include messages for the children which show how much the carers understand and care about them. These messages include:

- 'I know that you have struggled this week with boundaries at school and managing your emotions, but you have got through it and you're still smiling. It's holiday now, so you can kick back and chill out – Love you x.'
- 'Gosh, what a busy week you have had, netball, gymnastics, trampoline, party, school fair and a sleepover! I can hardly keep pace with you, I love that you are living life to the full, grabbing opportunities and making the most of them – you will go far my shining star! Love you kiddo xxxx.'

The children's guide clearly tells children that they can see their records. In a recent children's newsletter, the registered manager reminded children of this and how to raise any concerns that they have. The records will provide children with a good understanding of their childhood if they choose to look at them in the future.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 1237592

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Inspectors

Clive Lucas: social care inspector

Michael Mulvaney: social care inspector

Natalie Burton: social care inspector



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