

Anglia Fostering Agency

Anglia Fostering Agency Ltd

1st Floor, 12 Meridian Way, Meridian Business Park, Norwich NR7 0TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency has its office base in Norfolk and a sub-office in the East Midlands. It recruits, trains and supports foster carers across East Anglia and the East of England region. The agency provides a range of placements for all age groups, including short, medium and long-term care and permanency. It also provides therapeutic placements and parent and child placements. They have 60 fostering households, providing placements for 100 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 26 February to 1 March 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 26 January 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The children have very good experiences and make significant progress.
- The foster carers build strong relationships with the children, helping to develop a sense of permanence and security. The foster carers include the children fully in their family lives.
- The children get to take part in a wide range of enjoyable childhood experiences.
- The agency provides additional support for those children placed away from their home authorities, so that they do not receive a lesser overall service.
- The children make significant progress in their education, with some going on to further education and university.
- The carers have access to information and professionals to help them meet the children's health needs well.
- The carers help the children to access counselling and therapy.
- Individual children move to independence at a pace which is right for them.
- Prospective foster carers feel welcomed and well prepared.
- The children feel safe in their foster homes.
- The agency makes sure that the foster carers know about issues such as internet safety, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, so that they can keep the children safe.
- There is a very low level of children going missing. When they do, the foster carers act appropriately to help keep them safe.
- The agency and the foster carers take the safety of the children very seriously and act quickly and decisively if there are concerns about the children's safety. They are very child-focused.
- The agency is well managed and resourced and provides good support for the foster carers.
- The agency staff feel valued and supported.
- The agency matches the children to their carers very well.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- In some cases, the agency has not been successful in improving some carers' practice.
- The supervision records for the registered manager and some of those for foster carers are not sufficiently detailed.
- The foster panel minutes do not show that all identified issues are discussed, nor that issues are always identified.

- The foster panel does not always record a recommendation for the ongoing approval of foster carers.

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
In considering what recommendation to make, the fostering panel must consider and take into account all of the information passed to it in accordance with regulation 26, 27 or 28 (as the case may be). (Regulation 25(2)(a))	18/05/2018

Recommendations

- The panel chair should ensure that 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. (National Minimum Standards 14.7)
- Ensure that the foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. (National Minimum Standards 21.8)

In particular, this relates to the records of supervisions being informative and providing a record of discussions and decisions that are made within supervisions.

- The supervising social worker should ensure that each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service. (National Minimum Standards 21.9)

In particular, this relates to devising effective strategies to ensure that foster carers comply with the expectations of the service in order to ensure consistently high outcomes for children.

- A written record should be kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for the registered person. (National minimum Standards 24.5)

In particular, this relates to the quality of the supervision records.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The managers, staff and foster carers at this agency provide the children with very good experiences and help them to make significant progress. The children are very much the focus of the work that the agency does. The children are able to build strong relationships with their foster carers and the agency's staff. This helps them to develop a sense of permanence and security in their placements. One foster carer spoke about how she still keeps in contact with children she fostered over 11 years ago. The children who live with her now can see this and be assured that they can also have this support when they leave care. The children are supported through their moves into and out of their foster homes. There is a good level of planning, even when placements have to be made at short notice. This helps the children to manage their moves which are very significant and can be times of stress and uncertainty.

The day-to-day experiences that children have and the care and support that they receive from their foster carers helps them to have enjoyable childhood experiences and a positive experience of family life. In turn, this helps them to develop their sense of self-worth and build emotional resilience. The children are fully included in the foster carers' families. They enjoy taking part in activities with the carers' families, such as going on holiday. The children also take part in a wide range of leisure activities and clubs, such as cadets, sports groups, Duke of Edinburgh award, swimming and horse riding. Some children are happy just spending time with their foster families and their friends. This is their choice, which they are free to make. When children are placed a distance from their home authorities, the agency works to ensure that their needs are met well. One placing social worker who has a child placed outside of the area said that she appreciates the additional help that the agency provides and in particular the support from the placement manager for the child. This helps to ensure that all children receive the help and support that they need.

The children make very significant progress in their education. Some had little or no engagement in education when they were placed with the agency. Their foster carers support and encourage them to attend and take part in their education. Where there are barriers to this, the agency will provide support and when necessary challenge other agencies. This has helped the children to make greater educational achievements. Some take on responsible roles such as class representatives, or librarians. Some older children go on to further education or university. One child in further education had problems with her course and had to leave it. Her foster carer worked proactively with the college to find another, more suitable course. As a result, this child is still in further education, doing well and enjoying the experience when she may otherwise have left it completely. A foster carer spoke about a child who moved in with her and would sit at the back of the class and not engage. She has moved from this situation to sitting at the front and being one of the first to put her hand up to answer questions.

The foster carers ensure that the children's health needs are met and that the children can live healthy lives. The agency ensures that the foster carers have the knowledge they need to care for children with specialist health needs, making links with health professionals and providing links to reading and online information. There is therapy and support for children to help ensure that their emotional health needs are also met. In particular, the therapeutic foster placements help the children to develop their emotional resilience, but this is the case in other placements as well. A placing social worker said that her child's carer had been very good at supporting the child to attend counselling and getting additional support from the child's college. The foster carers know how to manage and record any medication that the children take. Some older children are able to manage their own medication with support from their foster carers. This helps them to prepare for their independence.

The foster carers help the children to learn independence skills so that they are more able to manage well when they live independently. Some children stay with their foster carers after they reach 18 years of age, while others choose to move to more independent placements. There is a focus on what is right for the child, so some stay on and continue to receive the support and help of their foster carers as part of their families. This can increase the chances of the young people successfully completing further education and becoming independent at a pace which is right for them. Those young people who choose to move to more independent placements can continue to receive support from their previous foster carers. This helps to ensure that the young people can make successful transitions to adulthood based on their individual needs and choices. One social worker spoke of how much a foster placement had given a young person the experiences and support to take forwards to future independence.

The foster carers and the agency staff listen to the children and take their views seriously. The agency's placement managers see the children alone regularly. There is a low turnover of agency staff, so for some children the placement managers are more constant figures in their lives than their social workers. The agency consults the children as part of the foster carers' annual reviews and also through an active participation group. For example, this group has come up with a series of questions that are used at foster panels when considering prospective carers or reviewing carers' ongoing approval. The children have their views taken into account in relation to their care plans. Their views on contact with families are listened to and acted upon. Some play very active parts in their children in care reviews. This level of engagement helps the children to have an influence on their day-to-day care and their wider care plans.

Prospective foster carers spoke very highly of their experiences with the agency and were very complimentary of the process and the support they have received so far. They felt supported while on their preparation course and also when at home. They have been encouraged to ask any questions between sessions. They feel that they have been responded to quickly and appropriately. They shared their observations that the agency staff are very grounded and passionate about what they do and that is evident in the information that they present as part of the preparation course.

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

The children feel safe in their foster homes. Their foster carers have a high level of knowledge about managing risks and keeping children safe. This includes keeping children safe while using the internet and safe from risks of child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. There is training on child sexual exploitation, which a foster carer described as a good course which helped her think things through and reinforced some of the caring she provides. There is flexibility in this training and one carer who could not make the second day had the trainer spend time with her discussing the child she had in placement. In addition to this, the agency has a lead child sexual exploitation worker who can provide information to other staff and foster carers. She keeps herself up to date on developments and research. The agency provides information on internet safety through regular updates to foster carers, so that they remain well informed and do not have to wait until a refresher training course. This helps to ensure that the carers who need information to keep children safe get it in a timely and effective way. The children also get information on keeping themselves safe, such as leaflets on internet safety and some have attended a workshop on it run by the agency. In addition to this placement, managers work directly with some children. Directly engaging the children is a very effective way of helping them to keep themselves safe which complements the comprehensive work done by the agency and foster carers.

The foster carers help the children to take and manage age-appropriate risks, so that they are better able to keep themselves safe now and in the future when they are living more independently. Foster carers provided some outstanding examples of this. For example, one child had family members who were a potential risk in a nearby city. As he got older and his friends started going to the city on their own, the carers worked with him and his friends to prepare them for what to do if they met the family, how they could contact the carers and arranged meet-up points. This enabled the child to share the growing-up experiences of his peers with support from them and his carers.

When there are concerns about children's unsafe behaviours, the agency and foster carers respond quickly and decisively to identify and reduce the levels of risk. This helps the children to become safer and know that the adults around them care about them being safe. Through the use of risk assessments, helps to identify and manage risk. Placement managers update the risk assessments with the foster carers when risks change or new risks arise. For example, one young person has recently passed her driving test, so the risk assessment was updated to consider how, as a new driver, she could be helped to keep safe in bad weather conditions. The quality assurance manager has researched serious case reviews and used this information to provide training for panel members. This helps to ensure that the foster panels are well informed and more able to focus on safeguarding through their work.

There is a very low level of children going missing from care. When they do go missing, carers act quickly and effectively to help keep them safe. The foster carers also take strong and effective action to respond to incidents of children being

bullied. A placing social worker spoke of how well a foster carer had worked with a child to help manage the risks of her staying out and of self-harming. She said that she was 'taken aback' by the quality of the relationship between the carer and the child. The safety and well-being of the children are taken very seriously by the agency and the foster carers. This begins with the preparation to foster course. Prospective carers who have attended this course have a very clear understanding of safeguarding issues. The agency follows safeguarding procedures to respond to any concerns so that there is a multi-agency approach to keeping the children safe. The assessment of foster carers is thorough and has a focus on safeguarding; this helps to reduce the chances of the children being looked after by unsuitable adults. The recruitment of agency staff also follows the required processes to ensure that all appropriate checks are undertaken.

The placement managers help the foster carers to reflect on the children's behaviour so that they can manage it more effectively and also to help them understand the behaviour. One carer said that this had helped her to maintain a placement. There is some very child-focused work on conflict and behaviour management, involving the children in discussions about their behaviour. This helps the children to understand and manage their own behaviour rather than relying on the use of sanctions. This has helped some children to make much more progress in their education. A placing social worker said that, 'The foster carer's calm but structured approach has supported [the child] to develop so much.'

The agency strongly promotes advocacy for the children so that they can have independent support and advice when they need it. They know how to make complaints. The agency has dealt with recent complaints quickly and well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed by a permanent, well-experienced and qualified registered manager. She was described by a member of staff as 'inspirational'. The agency is well staffed and resourced to provide a very high level of support to foster carers, enabling them to look after the children well. A member of staff commented that, 'The directors are really passionate about what they do and what they want to achieve for children who are in their care. This is then further filtered down to staff and foster carers alike.' Another said that, 'This is the most child-centred and professional organisation I have worked in.' The staff are very happy to be working for this agency and this helps to ensure a good consistency of staff, who develop skills and experience.

The foster carers feel very well supported by the agency. They have very good relationships with placement managers, who they say follow things up for them quickly. There is always good support, even at weekends and evenings. This helps the carers to provide good outcomes for the children and can help them maintain placements even when things are difficult. Some foster carers described it as like being in a big family. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the individual children and foster carers. They know the strengths and areas for development of the agency and they are keen to make improvements. The agency employs a quality assurance manager and has given placement managers areas of

specialist responsibility to help identify areas of improvement and act on this information. However, in a very few cases, where issues have been identified around the foster carers' practice, the agency's attempts to address the issues have had limited success. While many carers and placement managers describe appropriate relationships which question (and if necessary challenge) practice, in cases where this is not effective this can limit the outcomes for the children. The foster carers have regular supervision with placement managers and, in the case of therapeutic placements, therapeutic practitioners. Since the previous inspection, all of these supervision sessions are now recorded. However, in some cases the records are not informative and do not contain information about discussions and decisions that are made within supervisions. This can limit the monitoring of the service and lead to uncertainty over what is expected of the foster carers and the agency. Agency staff receive regular supervision and good-quality annual appraisals. They have good inductions and access to relevant training. This helps to create an environment where the staff feel valued and supported. Since the last inspection, the registered manager has regular supervision. This is a positive step forwards, but the records are brief and do not reflect the responsibility of the registered manager's role. While the registered manager feels well supported with regular and easy access to the directors, the lack of detailed records can lead to a lack of clarity and accountability.

The agency has two foster panels, one operating in the Midlands area and one in Norfolk. The panels have a wide range of panel members with a good gender and skills mix. The two panel chairs feel able to be independent in the recommendations that they make. They help to perform a quality assurance role for the agency. One described how the quality of reports presented to them has risen after they identified issues with them. Panel chairs and the agency are aware that there are, at times, issues with the panel minutes, but they have not yet been fully addressed. In some cases, issues are identified by panel members, but there is no record of them being followed up in discussion with the agency staff or foster carers. In other cases, issues within agency staff's reports are not picked up and addressed by the panel (according to the minutes). Sometimes there are no records of the panel's recommendations about the ongoing approval of foster carers as part of their annual reviews. It is unclear if this is all due to the quality of the minutes. Lack of clear minutes makes it difficult to monitor the effectiveness of the panel and does not provide clear audit trails of decision-making. Some recent changes to panel have reduced the diversity of panel members, but the agency is aware of this and seeking to address it.

There is very good matching of children with foster carers, which helps to ensure that children can thrive in their placements and that there is a low level of placement breakdown. The agency is focused on providing the right placement rather than making an inappropriate placement for the sake of it. Several foster carers made positive comments about the quality of the matching. The agency has good, effective relationships with other agencies such as placing local authorities. Commissioners from local authorities rate the agency highly and describe it as progressive. They say that agency staff are open to listening to what the local authorities need and trying to adapt and offer solutions. Commissioners also say that the agency goes above and beyond to support the carers and the children with them. This does not stop the agency from challenging other agencies to ensure that

the children get the services they need and deserve.

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 differences 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 whom 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: SC406969

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