

Barnardo's Fostering South East

Barnardo's

128 London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0PL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's Fostering, South East provides emergency, short-term and long-term placements for children and young people. It also provides short breaks for children who may be living with their own families or in foster care.

At the time of this inspection, the agency supported 26 fostering households, caring for 20 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 March 2018

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 15 August 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- An extended period of fractured management arrangements has contributed to weak management monitoring and oversight. This, in turn, has led to significant drift, delay and a lack of challenge to staff and foster carers in some areas. In a few instances, the agency approach to safeguarding and risk management has been insufficiently robust.
- The voice of every child is not at the centre of agency thinking and action. Some complaints and allegations have not been responded to or reported as required. The expressed views and wishes of a minority of children and young people have been overlooked.
- Managers and staff have not routinely ensured that foster carers have access to and attend the training necessary to meet children's identified needs.
- A small minority of foster carers are not familiar with the agency-approved behaviour management approach, and have used measures that are not completely consistent with it.
- Recording is weak and inconsistent. It does not provide children or young people with information that will be helpful when they access their files.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- The administrative team and senior support worker have provided consistency during a period of considerable change.
- The registered manager is rebuilding the staff team, with good support from senior managers.
- Most children and young people live in stable placements. The majority of moves out of foster care are in accordance with children's and young people's care plans.

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
<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 placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that foster carers receive the training necessary to support the children whom they are caring for.</p>	31/5/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1), (3). (Regulation 17(2))</p>	31/5/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. (Regulation 13(2)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all foster carers are familiar with and adhere to the agency policy on and procedure for acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with them.</p>	31/5/2018
<p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a 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. (Regulation 20(3)(c) schedule 1(4))</p>	31/5/2018
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35(1)(a) schedule 6)</p>	31/5/2018

Recommendations

- Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. (NMS 4.2)

In particular, ensure that the strategies outlined in risk management plans contain sufficient detail.

- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. (NMS 20.3)
- The foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events. (NMS 26.7)
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household. (NMS 1.1)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children and young people benefit from sound matching arrangements which lead to generally stable placements. For some children and young people, this has meant permanency within their foster families. One foster carer said, 'X fits with our family'. A commissioner described the 'fantastic' benefits to a young person from living with a foster carer of similar heritage. There are few unplanned endings.

Those children and young people who are settled are making good progress. However, the supporting records are sparse and do not tell the story of the lives of the children and young people. This does not provide them with the opportunity to reflect on and understand their history.

Most children and young people feel that their foster carers listen to them. One child gave an example of how the arrangements to meet family members have changed in the light of the views that she has shared with her foster carer. There are some examples where staff and/or foster carers have not taken action in response to children's and young people's views and wishes. New staff are in the process of building relationships with children and young people. The agency is in the early stages of piloting an app for gaining their voice. Staff also seek children's and young people's opinions at agency fun days.

Children and young people describe good support for education. For some, this has helped them to significantly improve their school attendance. One young person spoke proudly of her recent achievement towards gaining a qualification.

Foster carers are proactive in ensuring that the holistic health needs of children and young people are met. A commissioner described a child as 'flourishing'.

Children and young people enjoy a range of activities and opportunities through both their foster families and the agency. Their participation has a positive impact on their self-esteem and well-being.

Foster carers provide children and young people with the support necessary to maintain the links and relationships that are important to them.

Children and young people benefit from moves that are well managed, both into and out of families. One young person was pleased that her foster carers visited her before she moved in with them. The agency promotes 'staying put' arrangements, where this meets the needs of the young adult.

Most, but not all, children and young people develop an increasing awareness of their emotions and are learning how to express these safely. This is achieved through positive relationships with foster carers and their consistent, caring maintenance of boundaries. A social worker commented that this has 'shifted

patterns of behaviour'. This is also recognised by a young person, who spoke very positively about the difference that being in foster care has made to her.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

There is an inconsistent approach to responding to potential safeguarding concerns. In a minority of cases, the voice of the child has not been kept at the centre of agency thinking and action. As a result, some complaints and allegations have not been responded to or reported as required.

Both agency staff and foster carers have a variable understanding of risk. Some children and young people benefit from the effective implementation of clear risk management and safety plans. This has led to a reduction in 'missing' episodes and substance misuse. In a small minority of cases, there is a lack of awareness, professional curiosity and urgency in responding to potentially significant incidents that may impact on the child or young person. Risk assessments are not always updated following an intervention. This misses an opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness. Some risk assessments do not specify the management strategies needed to minimise the identified risks.

Some foster carers have received targeted training in response to the needs of children and young people, and some young people have benefited from direct specialist work, for example in relation to child sexual exploitation. However, not all staff are trained in this or have an awareness of the resources within the wider organisation or nationally. Not all foster carers are up to date with the all the training necessary to support the children and young people whom they are caring for. There is a piecemeal approach to the range of training that underpins the safeguarding of children and young people. This approach is insufficiently proactive, and does not equip foster carers to identify new and emerging risks for the children and young people in their care.

Foster carers are positive about the benefits of supervision, which has been maintained despite the changes to the staff team. Some foster carers apply the learning from the training that they have received and that informs their approach to positive interventions with children and young people. A small number of foster carers are supporting and managing behaviour on the basis of their own experiences, rather than within the agency-approved framework. This may have been a contributory factor on the few occasions when foster carers' application of behaviour management measures has not been wholly appropriate. The recording of incidents is weak and does not evidence challenge, and fails to enable management oversight. Foster carers rarely use physical intervention. Any such use is recorded and reviewed by the manager.

The agency generally applies sound recruitment practice and incorporates children's and young people's voice. However, the agency does not routinely seek verification of the reasons why an employment has ended.

Children and young people live in houses that are safe. This is assured by the

agency's annual health and safety checks of carers' homes. Unannounced visits take place more often than the required frequency.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The registered manager has been in post for a short time. Her appointment follows a period of two and a half years of changing management arrangements and expanding geographical coverage. These have caused significant drift and delay and a lack of challenge in a number of key areas. The manager's initial focus has been on stabilising the service and beginning to address the deficits.

The past year has also seen significant changes in the composition of the social work staff team. The combination of these changes and weak recording by some foster carers means that the agency's knowledge and records of the progress that children and young people have made are incomplete. The manager has recently introduced the use of an electronic outcomes tracker to establish a baseline from which to measure progress.

The consistent and knowledgeable administration team, along with a dedicated senior project worker, has provided foster carers with a sense of stability and is a strength of the service.

The statement of purpose lists a huge range of placement needs that the agency can meet from within a very small pool of foster carers. There is an over-reliance on foster carers' work experience and training, which may differ significantly from providing care in their own home. Some foster carers are self-motivated and regularly attend training and support groups to provide a solid, informed basis for their work with children and young people. Since the last inspection, managers and staff have not provided sufficient challenge to those foster carers who have been reluctant to engage in training or attend support groups. The new staff team is bringing a new impetus and seeking to be creative in how staff move forward with foster carers to address the challenges, which include the very wide geographic area supported by the head office. Other support mechanisms, such as a 'buddy' system, are due to be reintroduced. The introduction of the independent reviewing officer role is also helping to drive improvement in these areas.

Managers have developed a training programme for this year in the light of the identified needs. The programme is tailored to promote foster carers' attendance and is supported by online training. Foster carers' achievement of the training, support and development standards for foster care is not in line with expectations, and this is also being addressed.

Staff are primarily home based. They are developing improved systems for information sharing to support the out-of-hours duty system. The manager provides staff with good support through regular supervision and team meetings. The manager has recently introduced reflective learning sessions for staff. The last management review of the service was a year ago. This was weak and did not support the development of the service. The new manager has not yet

undertaken such a review, but has been working to address deficits, for example by ensuring that all foster carers have an up-to-date annual review, which has been achieved.

The manager, her team and the foster carers are becoming more familiar with the electronic recording system. This is yet to be bedded in, and there remain weaknesses in sharing the information that is required for management response and monitoring. This includes complaints, managing allegations and behaviour management.

The agency has developed effective partnerships with placing authorities, and ensures that they work together to meet the needs of the children and young people placed. Commissioners, in particular, speak very positively about the agency. One described them as 'the most responsive provider'.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of this agency's fostering households. The number of approvals – one in the last 15 months – has not kept pace with the number of resignations. A team member is developing a recruitment strategy in the light of her analysis of referrals from placing authorities. She has developed a strong system for timely follow-up to enquiries and invitations to preparation training, with delivery tailored to need. There has been some delay to current assessments. The manager has acknowledged this, and plans are in place to prevent any recurrence.

The established panel is led by an experienced and knowledgeable chair. The panel provides good challenge to the service through analysis of assessments and annual foster carer reviews.

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 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: SC043552

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Inspectors

Maire Atherton, social care inspector

Rosie Dancer, social care inspector



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