

Barnardo's Fostering Service

Barnardo's

Unit 6, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Leeds LS12 6AJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's is a limited company and a registered charity. Barnardo's Fostering Service is a national independent fostering agency, providing fostering and short-break services. This agency provides fostering services across Yorkshire, Humber and North Lincolnshire. It currently has 49 children and young people in placement and 37 foster carers.

It was registered in 2006. A manager has been appointed but is not yet registered.

Inspection dates: 25 to 29 June 2018

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	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 March 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:

- Many of the children and young people are in long-term placements which provide them with the security and sense of belonging that they need to thrive.
- Permanence is actively promoted by the agency. The carers are supported to apply for special guardianship orders. Some children and young people go on to be adopted by their carers.
- The children and young people are looked after by experienced and committed carers who understand their needs and include them in their family life. This level of understanding provides children and young people with a wide range of experiences and activities, which develop their skills and self-esteem.
- All the children and young people are making progress in their education, health and well-being. The progress is supported by the stability of the children's and young people's placements.
- Children and young people receive the help that they need to keep themselves safe. Incidents of children and young people going missing from home are extremely rare.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The service provided by the agency has been affected by management and staff vacancies. This has resulted in some shortfalls in the support and information provided to carers. It has also led to a failure to provide HMCI with all the required updated documentation.
- The registered person failed to make notifications of events listed in schedule 7 to HMCI as required. However, following the employment of a new interim manager, this has been corrected and notifications are now being made in line with regulations.
- Carers are unclear about their entitlement to short-break care to help them deal with the demands of the fostering role.
- One allegation, made against a carer, did not result in a timely referral to the designated officer by the interim manager. Immediate actions were taken to ensure that the child remained safe in partnership with the local authority social worker. However, the new interim manager is clear about her duty to make appropriate and timely referrals.

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, the 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—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide; and</p> <p>notify the chief inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a) and (b))</p>	15/08/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it; and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 19 (a) and (b))</p>	31/08/2018
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p>	31/08/2018

Recommendations

- Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', paragraph 21.5)
- On approval, foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources. This information is updated regularly. ('Fostering Services: National

Minimum Standards', paragraph 21.10)

- Each fostering service has a designated person, who is a senior manager, responsible for managing allegations. The designated person has responsibility for liaising with the local authority's designated officer and for keeping the subject of the allegation informed of progress during and after the investigation. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', paragraph 22.5)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency has a core base of very experienced and committed carers. They offer extremely secure long-term placements for a significant number of the children and young people. This helps the agency to secure its aim outlined in the statement of purpose, 'To promote secure attachments and placement stability for children and young people in order to achieve better outcomes for children's health, education, employment and future independence.'

Several children have been adopted by their carers or become subject to special guardianship orders. There are also a number of young people who stay with their carers beyond the age of 18, although the agency is not currently formally supporting any young people under staying put arrangements. This consistency in care reflects good progress for the children and young people, who are able to form secure attachments following early trauma. The young people are now part of secure family networks which continue to support them through their transition into adulthood.

Some of the children and young people have additional health needs. Their carers have a wealth of experience and skills in supporting such needs. The carers work together with health and education professionals to ensure that the children and young people receive the services that they need. Most of these children and young people have been in their placements for several years.

All the children and young people are in education or training and are making progress. One young person is in the top five performing students in Year 11. The teacher for another child said, 'The progress that [name of child] has made is vast.'

Through being an integral part of the foster carers' families, the children and young people experience a wide range of social and recreational activities. One young person takes part in water sports competitions, which is building positive self-esteem and confidence. The agency promotes activities for all the children and young people by asking carers to ensure that, where possible, children and young people are members of at least two clubs or organisations, such as Scouts, Guides, karate, after-school clubs or drama classes.

In accordance with agreed plans, the agency's staff and carers fully support the children and young people to maintain contact with family members and others who are significant in their lives. They also encourage the children and young people to make friends and enjoy appropriate experiences with them. For example, one young person is going on holiday to Vietnam with a friend and their family.

Most of the carers feel that they are part of the team that cares for their child or young person and value the support provided by the agency. However, relationships between the agency and some carers have suffered because of staffing issues. There has been a significant turnover of supervising social workers and agency

management that has impacted on the consistency and availability of support at times. Senior management is alleviating these difficulties by using agency staff and interim managers but acknowledges that there have been shortfalls.

Because of the experience of carers and the security of placements, the staffing instability has not affected the positive progress of the children and young people.

Most of the carers and professionals spoken with during the inspection are of the view that the situation regarding the staffing and performance of the agency is improving. One carer said: 'I think that we are starting to get back to what we were – a big family.'

The agency commissions the services of an independent psychotherapist who offers support to any carers to help them cope with the demands of the fostering role. Carers have found this extremely helpful and it has contributed to the long-term stability of placements. Carers are also supported by an out-of-hours service, which provides prompt advice and support when needed.

Some carers report that it is difficult to access enough short-break care to help them deal with the demands placed upon them. Senior management acknowledges that there is a shortage of short-break placements and has some new carers currently going through the assessment process. Carers are also confused about their entitlement to short breaks. The foster carers' handbook is currently being updated to provide clarity around this issue.

Due to the staff vacancies, there is less activity around recruiting new foster carers. This is resulting in a low number of vacancies which affects the ability to provide placements. However, when carers have been recruited, assessment is timely and carers felt well supported through the process.

There is careful matching to ensure that it is a positive experience for both the carers and the children and young people. One carer said that she was frustrated when she had to wait for a placement after approval. However, she now appreciates the care taken to make the right choice, as she has two children in place who are 'perfect for her family'.

There is a lack of diversity within the pool of carers, but this is not an issue for any of the children and young people currently placed. All the carers are expected to undertake training around diversity issues.

The agency offers a small but appropriate range of training to the carers, with an emphasis on therapeutic parenting and attachment. The agency's staff are starting to increase the range of training offered to carers and source training for carers who need specific skills. One group of carers has sourced a massage course. The massage is helpful to those children and young people who have additional needs. The agency has agreed to fund the course.

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

The stability of placements and the quality of the relationships between the children and young people and their carers are promoting their safety and well-being.

Incidents of problematic behaviour during placement are infrequent, with carers able to manage behaviour as part of family life. Supervising social workers assist carers in this process. For example, helping a carer and young person to create a written agreement around expectations of behaviour that stabilised the placement.

The use of physical intervention with children and young people is very infrequent. When it occurs, carers are recording it appropriately. However, the manager is not able to maintain effective scrutiny of any patterns around the use of restraint because of the way in which the reports are saved to the agency's electronic recording system. The interim manager immediately rectified this during the inspection.

The children and young people are safeguarded well by their carers, who are supported by individualised risk management plans. Incidents of children and young people going missing from home are extremely rare. The carer of one young person who had been missing from home was very knowledgeable about the going missing procedure in the safe care plan and ensured that it was followed. As a result, he was returned home safely. One young person described how she keeps in touch with her carer by text and phone when she is out in the community. She fully appreciates the reason for needing to do this and is happy to comply.

All carers are required to undertake safeguarding training as part of their development. The agency has also recently introduced online training around child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and radicalisation. Some carers do not see the appropriateness of this training for their circumstances. However, the agency is insisting that it is completed. This is good practice because it ensures that the carers understand the wider areas of safeguarding children and young people in the context of current risks.

The carers are made aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding in their foster carer agreements. These agreements also include an expectation that carers will ensure that the children and young people are safe when using the internet. The carers have access to safeguarding policies and procedures on the agency's electronic system.

All necessary security checks are undertaken when carers and staff are recruited. Annual health and safety checks of carers' homes are thorough. These measures help to ensure that the children and young people live in environments that are safe.

The agency swiftly responds to any allegations against carers. Appropriate action is taken to secure the immediate welfare of the children and young people. However, in one case, the agency did not immediately inform the local authority's designated officer, believing that the local authority social worker had done so. This was an error by the interim manager at the time of the incident. The current interim manager is well aware of her responsibility to inform the local authority's designated officer and this error has not been repeated.

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

The agency does not currently have a registered manager in place. A manager has been appointed, but the successful candidate is on maternity leave. She is due to commence her role in the next two months. The agency has been covering this gap with interim management, which has been variable in quality. This has led to shortfalls in some leadership and management requirements.

Since the last inspection, several safeguarding notifications have not been submitted in a timely way to HMCI. The current interim manager has audited all the case files to ensure that the agency now complies with regulation and has put a new system in place to ensure that this cannot happen in the future.

The foster carers' handbook has not been reviewed to reflect new information for carers, which has led to confusion among some carers about their conditions of service. A new handbook is now ready to be distributed. A recommendation regarding this is made at this inspection.

An up-to-date children's guide and statement of purpose have not been sent to HMCI. This prevents external monitoring and scrutiny. A recommendation regarding this is made at this inspection.

There has also been a considerable turnover of supervising social workers since the last inspection, with a number leaving because of their personal circumstances. The agency is currently covering these vacancies with agency staff. New staff have been recruited and are due to commence in post shortly. For a time, this led to gaps in monthly supervision for some carers and annual reviews not being completed on time. A requirement regarding the level of staffing is made at this inspection.

The current interim manager has been effective in stabilising management oversight and has undertaken a systematic review of the service. She has ensured that all carers now receive monthly supervision, that reviews are undertaken within statutory timescales and that supervising social workers receive consistent guidance and support through effective supervision and team meetings.

Senior management has responded to the concerns from carers by undertaking a survey and following it up with two consultation events. An action plan is in place which is progressing developments, such as the establishment of support groups, the recruitment of short-term carers and the creation of a carers' forum. Further participation and celebration events are planned, and the carers' newsletter has been re-established.

The performance of the agency is being scrutinised more fully by senior management using comprehensive quarterly monitoring reports. There are secure senior management reporting systems in place. A recommendation made at the last inspection is met.

Annual reviews of foster carers are undertaken by an experienced, independent reviewing officer. He has provided management with the appropriate degree of challenge regarding the gaps in performance of the agency created by the staff turnover. He is now confident that reviews are taking place within the required timescale, with the appropriate visits and checks completed.

The panel meets in accordance with regulations. The central list contains people with a range of experience in social work, health and education. However, it lacks diversity of gender, age and culture. The agency is taking steps to try to readdress this imbalance. A requirement to improve the written records of its proceedings is met. Safe recruitment of carers and their continued suitability is promoted through their work.

The agency's decision maker is making decisions within the required timescales. A recommendation made at the last inspection is met.

There have been two complaints made by carers since the last inspection, one of which is not complete. The agency's complaints procedure has been followed in each case. Senior management upheld some elements of the first complaint and undertook restorative action. There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The interim manager has quickly acquainted herself with the needs of the children and young people in placement. She is providing staff with the support to challenge decisions that are against children's and young people's wishes and feelings. Using an advocate, secured by the agency, one young person was able to return to the care of some previous short-term carers for a long-term placement. His independent reviewing officer was complimentary, saying: 'Without the supervising social worker, [name of child's] wishes would have been missed.'

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: SC068456

Registered provider: Barnardo's

Registered provider address: Unit 6, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road,
Leeds LS12 6AJ

Responsible individual: Alison Rowland

Registered manager: Post vacant

Telephone number: 0113 263 1464

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Inspector

Janet Black: social care inspector



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