

Eastern Fostering Services

Eastern Family Services Ltd

Unit 1E, The Gattinetts, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt, Colchester CO7 6QT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a small, privately owned independent fostering agency, which specialises in providing local placements to local children. The agency has 20 fostering households. The agency currently provides support to 17 children and young people predominantly within the Suffolk and Essex areas. The agency was first registered 7 December 2011. The fostering agency is able to provide task-centred fostering, parent and child placements, short breaks and longer-term placements.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 July 2018

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

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

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

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

Date of last inspection: 30 September 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 thrive in their stable and nurturing homes.
- The children make good progress.
- The children develop long-term supportive and meaningful relationships with their foster carers.
- The children feel safe, loved and valued.
- The agency staff and manager know each carer and child very well. This means they are able to provide the support that the children and carers need.
- The staff challenge other agencies to ensure that the children receive the specialist help and support they require.
- The agency works well in partnership with the children, parents and other agencies.
- Carers feel very well supported, respected and valued.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Monitoring arrangements are not sufficiently robust.
- The manager has not ensured that staff and carers consistently implement agency policies.
- The manager has not ensured that all carers undertake core training.
- There are no individual professional supervision arrangements for staff who work for the agency.
- The records held by the agency do not consistently demonstrate the level of care and support provided.
- The agency has not provided a copy of the updated statement of purpose to Ofsted.

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 fostering service provider must— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose, notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4(a)(b))	27/08/2018
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. 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) and (3). (Regulation 17(1)(2))	30/10/2018
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents. 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, and restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13(1)(2)(b)(c))	20/08/2018
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 system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(1)(a)(b) and (3))	26/11/2018

Recommendations

- Staff have access to support and advice, and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. (National Minimum Standards 24.4)
In particular, provide each member of staff with regular individual professional supervision.
- The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National Minimum Standards 25.2)
- Ensure that staff, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained. There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 26.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

As a result of the agency's good matching processes, children become central members of the family and enjoy high levels of placement stability. One professional said, 'He [the child] is settled and definitely part of a warm, loving family. He has flourished and done so well.' Another professional said about a different foster carer, 'She [the carer] is amazing. He [the child] has absolutely the right carer and he speaks really highly of her.' Matching documentation drawn up by the fostering agency staff is not clear about how gaps between the carer's background and skills and the child's needs will be bridged. This means that it is difficult to understand how effective or successful matching processes have been.

The children live in secure and caring environments where they receive individualised care and support. The carers develop very strong bonds with the children. They sometimes continue to maintain the children in the home in extremely difficult circumstances. One professional said, 'The carers deeply love the child and they're very much committed to his welfare.' The agency gives carers practical support and offers flexible care arrangements to help carers manage difficult situations. One professional said, 'Without the support the carers are getting from the agency, he [the child] wouldn't be doing so well.'

Foster carers understand the importance of birth family relationships and maintaining contact with people who are important to them. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children's cultural needs are well met and they are supported to make appropriate friendships within the Afghan community. This prevents the children becoming isolated. The children say that both their carers and the agency staff are there for them. The agency staff challenge other professionals when they fail to listen to the child. One child said, 'They [the foster carer and the agency] are doing a brilliant job. If I wasn't with this agency it would be 10 times worse. No one would remind them [the placing authority] what they should be doing.'

The children make good progress. They grow in confidence and maturity and show improved resilience and self-esteem. The children have fun. They enjoy participating in activities such as going to the local carnival, horse riding and gymnastics. They build happy memories of family experiences, such as holidays and owning pets. One child particularly likes singing to their fish tank that is full of fish and shrimps. One professional said, 'He [the child] is doing incredibly well and has had opportunities he would never have had in any other household.'

The majority of children are enrolled in education and are making good progress as a result of the encouraging attitude of their foster carers. For example, some carers have provided additional tuition. A small minority of children are not receiving formal education. A virtual head said the agency has always pressed for extra support for children where appropriate and that, 'Carers have gone above and beyond to maintain placements.'

Foster carers support older children to access suitable further education or employment. These children prepare for independent living with the stable support of their carers. This has helped them have a smoother transition into adult life.

The agency recruits only suitable foster carers and provides them with the initial choosing to foster training and support to help them begin to undertake the fostering role.

When asked about their fostering experience, the children say:

- 'I like just being at home.'
- 'I feel very much part the family.'
- 'It's a fantastic place. Nothing could be better.'

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

The children feel safe and protected. The agency social workers develop good relationships with the children. The children say that they feel that they can talk to the agency staff about anything. One child rated the agency social worker as '10 out of 10' and said this is because, 'She's such a lovely person. She just understands me.'

Incidents of children demonstrating risk-taking behaviours are low, and any such behaviours decrease from the time the children move in with their carers. There have been few occasions when children have gone missing. When it happens this has usually been because they have stayed out later than agreed. This is a great progress in personal safety for some of the children. For example, one child was missing for some months immediately before coming to live with their foster carer but has not gone missing since.

The carers and agency staff work in close partnership to help children deal with emotional distress and make positive decisions about their life. One social worker said, 'They have helped him [the child] come through the turbulent time in a better place than he was before.'

The carers provide loving homes to children, including some children who display unpredictable and highly complex challenging behaviours. One social worker said, 'The carers are fully committed to the child and have gone above and beyond to do what they can.'

As a result of children's unpredictable and unsafe behaviours, carers have sometimes used physical restraint. The agency behaviour management policy is clear but has not been consistently implemented. For example, carers have not notified the agency of each incident of restraint. Carers' weekly recordings that refer to restraints taking place have been inserted into incident reports by agency staff, but this may be some time later. This means that agency staff and social workers have not consistently had the information they need in order to be able to support children in a timely way. Furthermore, terms and descriptions used by carers in their recordings in relation to these incidents are not always clear. There is little evidence

of the actions staff take to explore these incidents further and satisfy themselves of the children's well-being.

The carers, agency staff and the manager know each of the children and their individual risks. However, on one occasion, foster carers failed to follow a child's individual car safety plan. This potentially placed the child, foster carers and members of the public at risk.

The children, including those who have been physically restrained, feel safe and nurtured by their carers. Their comments include:

- 'There is nothing that I don't like about living with my carers.'
- 'There's nothing that I don't like at home.'
- 'X and X [foster carers] are calm and happy to listen. They love me and want what's best for me.'

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

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced in managing fostering services. She has provided stability of leadership to staff over the past six years. The small size of the agency means that the manager knows each and every foster carer and child extremely well. However, this closeness has impacted on her ability to maintain robust oversight of specific aspects of the agency.

The manager has a good understanding of the strengths of the agency but the quality assurance mechanisms in place are not strong enough to alert her to the areas for development. The quality of care review does not evaluate the strengths and areas for improvement within the agency nor does it include the views of children and other stakeholders. It does not, therefore, allow the manager to explore opportunities to drive improvement or celebrate success.

The staff are valued and supported. Their opinions contribute to service development. The staff use the regular group supervision meetings as an opportunity to discuss their caseload within the close-knit team. However, the manager does not give staff regular, formal, individual supervision. As a result, her levels of management scrutiny over some individual incidents and staff professional development is limited.

Staff do not follow the agency's policies for maintaining records and there is a concerning lack of clarity in some important records. Furthermore, information held does not sufficiently demonstrate the actions that carers and staff say they take to ensure that children's well-being is consistently considered. The manager has not identified and followed up on these issues when she has become aware.

The fostering agency is appropriately resourced, which ensures that the services are delivered in accordance with the statement of purpose. The manager did not send a copy of the most recent update to the agency statement of purpose to Ofsted. This means that Ofsted as the regulator does not hold the most current information

about the service.

Not all foster carers have undertaken suitable training in core areas, such as first aid, preventing and managing physical restraint and understanding the risks of child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

Foster carers describe the agency as one that offers high-quality support and recognises the contribution of the fostering families as a whole. One carer said, 'I love the fact it's a small team, everybody is interested in and aware of, all of the children. I never need to explain the children's needs.' The carers appreciate that agency staff value all of the children whether they are fostered or are birth children who foster. Children who foster are able to access additional emotional support when they need to.

Equality and diversity are threaded through the service to ensure that children's individual needs are met. The manager and all staff are highly child-focused in their approach. One carer said, 'The agency has the care of the children at heart.' The carers are well supported and children make good progress. A professional said, 'I've seen him flourish, I see a totally different child.'

The agency staff are not reticent to challenge local authorities when their responses are not effective. As a result, the carers and children feel that the agency staff 'fight their corner.' The children consistently speak very positively of their experiences. One child rated the agency as '10 out of 10' because, 'they are so lovely and kind. They go the extra mile.'

The provider has taken suitable action to address the majority of requirements made at the previous inspection. Leadership and management are judged as requires improvement to become good, as some breaches of regulation and good practice have been identified at this inspection. The shortfalls identified have had no identifiable impact on the good care of children and young people. The manager has developed an action plan to get the agency back on track.

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: SC437835

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Inspector

Joanna Heller: social care inspector



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