

FosterCare UK

Fostercare UK Ltd

Kent Centre at Newbury House, Court Lodge Farm, Hinxhill, Ashford TN25 5NR

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is an independent fostering agency offering family placements for children and young people from birth to 18 years of age. Placement provision includes: short-term, long-term, respite, therapeutic and parent and child placements. At the time of this inspection, 59 children and young people were placed with 45 carers.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 January 2019

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 Good

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

Date of last inspection: 12 October 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:

- Children and young people settle quickly into placements and form supportive relationships with their foster carers.
- Placement stability is a high priority. In the last year, only 4% of placements came to an unplanned end.
- Outcomes for children and young people are positive. Many enjoy planned moves on to their own supported accommodation or remain with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements after their 18th birthday.
- Children and young people benefit from the Multi-Disciplinary Assessment and Treatment Service (MATS) which provides quick access to a wide variety of specialist services to support placements.
- Carers benefit from good levels of preparation for placements and ongoing training and support.
- Children and young people make progress in education. Only one young person was not engaging in education or training during this inspection.
- The agency makes good use of the 'signs of safety model' of working. This model encourages carers and professionals to be open and honest with young people as to their concerns. This promotes transparent and positive relationships.
- The fostering panel is effective and offers strong scrutiny and advice.
- The agency benefits from a committed senior management team that strives to achieve further progress.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- This inspection notes minor shortfalls in relation to: risk assessments, agency record-keeping, notification of serious events and feedback from young people. These shortfalls do not affect the quality of care offered to children and young people.

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>36: Notifiable events</p> <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.</p> <p>(2) Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36(1)(2))</p>	18/04/2019

Recommendations

- 1: The child's wishes and feelings

Ensure children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. (National Minimum Standards 1.3)

In particular, to ensure that the wishes and feelings of children are reflected in care plans and risk assessments.
- 4: Safeguarding children

Ensure the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National Minimum Standards 4.5)

In particular, to ensure that all risk assessments fully reflect all of the current concerns and strategies planned to address the risk concerned.
- 25: Managing effectively & monitoring

Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to quality assure written records and ensure that records are up to date. (National Minimum Standards 25.2)

In particular, to ensure that all case files contain up-to-date information.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people are settled in their placements. One young person informed the inspector, 'I am very happy in my home, they are very nice to me.' Foster carers offer a warm welcome and high levels of support. Carers encourage a wide range of activities and new experiences such as holidaying abroad, attending sea cadets, and playing rugby. One placing social worker commented, 'The carers have given him a sense of belonging, which he has never felt before.'

The MATS service is a major strength of the agency. This service offers immediate access to specialist support from psychotherapists, education psychologists and environmental therapists. These interventions offer a unique level of support to carers and the children and young people. Specialist assessments allow those involved to reflect and understand difficult previous histories and to see presenting behaviours in context.

The MATS service supports placement stability. Carers are encouraged to reflect on the impact for themselves personally and the possibility of 'secondary trauma'. Children and young people engage where previously they had been unwilling. Sessions with an environmental therapist allowed one young person to learn new skills such as building a fire during therapeutic sessions.

Education progress is prioritised. Case records show that children and young people value their education. This is supported by good levels of attendance and progress in key subjects such as Mathematics and English. Supervising social workers advocate well when issues occur. This included a recent successful challenge to a school when difficulties were noted with a specific teacher for one young person.

The achievements of children and young people and their carers are warmly celebrated. Progress goals are realistic and offer important incentives to maintain progress. Supervising social workers recognise progress by giving vouchers and certificates. The agency recently celebrated the adoption of a former foster child by carers.

Foster carers manage behaviour effectively. Carers are supported by good levels of training and a focus on consistent boundary setting. Carers have the ability to reflect on their own behaviours and how these are perceived. Children and young people respond by learning to manage their own behaviours and by building positive relationships with carers.

Children and young people learn new independence skills. Foster carers strive to support young people to develop budgeting, cooking or travelling to school by themselves. The agency explores options for transition planning at an early stage. Early planning helps to support and inform on decisions such as remaining with carers or moving onto supported accommodation.

Family contact is well supported. One foster carer planned their family holiday to support a young person to have contact with their sibling in Cornwall. Another carer has refused to accept an additional placement due to the importance of keeping a

bed free for overnight sibling visits. When contact is not positive, carers swiftly inform the professional network and protective action is taken.

Children and young people have an active voice in the agency. Young people support the agency by interviewing prospective foster carers. The 'speaker' group is facilitated by the MATS referral and duty social worker and recently supported the agency to clarify its policy on access to case files. Further work also included the benefits of accessing independent advocacy. This group is also attended by the birth children of carers. At present, care plans and risk assessments do not fully reflect the wishes and feelings of children and young people. This limits their effectiveness.

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

Multi-agency work is effective. Concerns are swiftly shared with outside agencies and the resulting safety plans evidence strong input from key agencies such as schools. When difficulties arise in placements, the agency is quick to offer increased support and supervision. There are well-established processes for senior management to monitor safeguarding practices across the agency.

Local authority safeguarding officers confirmed that the agency has good safeguarding practices in place and acts promptly in a transparent manner when concerns arise.

Advocacy for children and young people is strong. Carers push allocated social workers to expedite care planning decisions, such as agreeing overnight stays for children and young people. Supervising social workers seek alternative resources to support placements. Recently, this included accessing mentoring provision from a national charity that specialises in supporting young people at risk of criminal exploitation.

Foster carers are confident and understand their role well. Good levels of specialist training enable carers to work therapeutically in their homes. One foster carer informed the inspector, 'The agency is always there for me, the support is excellent.' Carers trust the agency to support them in times of difficulty. Their views and comments are an important part of the care planning process. Carers report good levels of information and consultation prior to each placement. This promotes a sense of trust and support.

Foster carers access support from each other as well as the agency. A 'buddy system' offers peer-to-peer support and provides a range of helpful tips and insight into placement difficulties. Recently, this included the decision to incorporate any changes to the household routine prior to placements beginning. This limits any disruption during the important initial weeks of a placement.

Direct work with carers is supported by strong theoretical principles. Supervising social workers use the 'signs of safety model' in their work with carers. This model helps carers to think through the impact that their family dynamics have on placements and helps them to better understand presenting behaviours.

The quality of risk assessments is variable. Some risk assessments are limited by poor case recording and do not fully reflect the complexity of the placement. This limits a full evaluation of the presenting issues.

Children and young people have reduced risk-taking behaviours such as absconding from placements. When this behaviour occurs, foster carers use their close knowledge of family and peer groups to proactively search the local area.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency benefits from a highly experienced and dedicated registered manager. She has worked for the agency for six years and has been in her current management role since February 2018. She is well supported by the former registered manager who remains with the agency. The registered manager is a qualified social worker who aims to complete the management qualification by July 2019.

The registered manager has overseen a period of upheaval within the agency, including a change in ownership and some staff turnover. These changes have not impacted on the quality of care offered to children and young people. One carer states, 'Despite a lot happening, it still feels like a big family.'

Managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service. An exciting service development plan focuses on greater use of the MATS provision and the development of the 'signs of safety' model of working.

Placement matching is a major strength of the service. Emergency placements are kept to a minimum with a preference for planned, managed introductions. The agency is very clear as to the specific needs of each placement. This includes the need for MATS provision. Positive matching results in good outcomes for young people and low levels of placement disruption. A placing social worker confirmed that, 'The agency is not motivated by filling placement vacancies.'

Staff morale is positive. The team is excited by the future and a climate of trust and empowerment within the agency. Staff felt that they have the opportunity and the capacity to build relationships with carers. The MATS service is a source of pride for staff who value its positive impact on placements and the development of foster carers. Staff reported an engaging programme of training and effective supervision. Staff can access clinical supervision via the MATS service, and this supports further reflection and the analysis of concerns in a safe space.

Management monitoring and audit is evident on case files. Where placing authorities fail to meet the needs of children and young people, managers offer open and constructive feedback to ensure that placements are fully supported.

Managers display a good oversight of the individual learning needs of each carer. Where standards of care fall below expectation, prompt action is taken to address this.

The agency failed to notify Ofsted of a significant safeguarding event. This limited the exchange of key information among agencies and affected the preparation for

this inspection.

The fostering panel offers good levels of scrutiny and oversight. The panel members are recruited from a broad range of backgrounds and skills. Recommendations are relevant and effective. The panel works in close partnership with managers to monitor and quality control foster carer assessments and their subsequent review. If appropriate, the panel delays or amends the approvals of carers to allow for the completion of further assessment work and training. This ensures that carers are ready and fully assessed.

Recruitment practice for foster carers and staff is safe. The agency has good systems in place for the vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the agency.

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: SC363485

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Registered provider address: Wootton Chase, Wootton St. Lawrence,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG23 8PE

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Registered manager: Teresa Scott

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Inspectors

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector

John Pledger, social care inspector (Mon-Tue)



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