

# Beams Foster Care and Family Service Ltd

Beams Foster Care and Family Services Limited  
Shrublands Cottages, Magdalen Way, Gorleston, Norfolk NR31 7BP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned fostering service provides a range of placements, including respite, short-term, bridging, permanent and long-term. It provides services for children who have disabilities. The service currently has 17 sets of foster carers.

The registered manager has been in post since the service was registered, in 2014.

**Inspection dates:** 11 to 14 February 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:** 29 February 2016

**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 build trusted and secure relationships with their carers, which help them to develop feelings of permanence and security.
- The carers help the children to develop healthy lifestyles.
- The carers help the children to engage and do well in their education.
- The children get opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities. These include activities with their carers, in the community and with the agency.
- Supervising social workers regularly spend time with the children. They listen to children and give them opportunities to talk about any worries.
- The carers help the children to develop appropriate independence skills.
- The carers support the children to spend positive time with their families.
- The agency has a strong focus on keeping children safe.
- The carers help the children to take age-appropriate risks, so that they can learn how to keep themselves safe.
- The children become safer because of the time that they spend with their carers.
- The agency has clear expectations of the carers, and carers know what these expectations are.
- The agency has effective oversight of the carers and responds to any identified concerns.
- The agency makes child-centred decisions about the approval of the carers.
- Managers and staff know the carers and the children well.
- The carers are pleased to work for the agency. They value the good support that they get.
- Children are matched well with foster carers.
- Carers access training that helps them to provide a good level of care for the children.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- While the agency usually identifies and responds to risk, this had not happened in one of the cases that was looked at during the inspection.
- Some records of the children going missing from care lack information and do not include the circumstances of the child's return. Lack of information makes monitoring difficult.
- The agency does not send notifications of significant events to Ofsted in a timely way. There have been some significant delays that prevented Ofsted from having sufficient oversight of the service and the experiences of the children.

- The agency has not undertaken annual appraisals of the fostering panel members. Therefore, panel members are not receiving regular feedback on their roles and the agency does not have clear information on individual panel members' performance and development needs.

## 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>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 of The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 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> <p>In particular, notify Ofsted of any of the specified events in a timely manner.</p>	<p>29/03/2019</p>

### Recommendations

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National Minimum Standards 4.5)
- Ensure that written records kept by the fostering service of when a child goes missing detail action taken by foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the foster home and any action taken in the light of those reasons. (National Minimum Standards 5.10)
- Ensure that each panel member's performance is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, paragraph 5.15)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children build trusted and secure relationships with their carers. Successful long-term placements help the children to develop a sense of permanence. The children, carers and social workers are unanimously positive about the care that the children receive. Local authority reports talk about children who thrive with carers. The stability of placements helps children to develop strong, supportive relationships and a positive self-view.

The children develop a sense of family and belonging in their placements. They spoke positively about the placements, the quality of food and enjoying mealtimes with carers. The carers help the children to develop healthy lifestyles. They help children to attend and achieve in their education. The carers and agency staff attend meetings with school staff to develop plans that are linked to educational goals. This approach helps the children to achieve more in their education and will improve their later life chances.

The children enjoy a wide variety of rich experiences, many of which they have not had before. They benefit from family games, sports, going to local community clubs and going on holidays. These experiences help build children's confidence and understanding of the local environment and the wider world. They also help the children to develop their self-confidence and provide equality of opportunity in line with their friends.

The children have recently been invited to attend a child participation group. The supervising social workers set aside time for the children to talk about placements and express any concerns. These groups give the children opportunities to voice their views. The carers receive training in how to help children communicate. Carers make good use of strategies offered by the agency to help children who have communication difficulties have their say and be heard. These strategies include pictorial prompts that show children what comes next. Other specific resources have soothed and reassured young children who were unsettled.

The carers support children to develop appropriate independence. A child spoke of the difference that this has made to organising free time, using public transport and generally developing life skills. The child said, 'I used to go out a lot, but without agreement. I always come back on time now. I am never late. [The carers] have to know where I am.'

Staying put is considered for some children. This concept is introduced to foster carers during their initial assessment to encourage carers to provide children with ongoing stability and security into early adulthood, when this is appropriate.

Carers are very good at helping the children to spend time with and have positive experiences with their families, when this is in the children's best interests. The carers work in partnership with parents to make the time that the children spend

with them positive. In some cases, parents benefit from support when they are with their children. This united approach provides consistency of care and helps the children to maintain relationships with their families.

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

The agency has a strong focus on keeping children safe. The managers and staff deal with allegations in a way that puts children's welfare at the centre. There is a swift and responsive approach to managing safeguarding concerns. Actions include working with designated officers and social workers, and other agencies. Active pursuit of responses from those agencies helps to make sure that concerns are investigated properly and children are safeguarded effectively.

The carers talk to children about risk taking and encourage them to make informed and sensible choices. A child who had previously experimented with cannabis and smoking said that she did not know where she would be now without the carers' support. Children feel safer and are protected from their past experiences and risk-taking behaviours. They are supported to take age-appropriate risks, such as managing free time with friends in the community and using public transport safely.

Supervising social workers and carers minimise risk by using risk assessments and safer caring plans. Good, effective training and support help the carers to manage behavioural incidents well. They use tailored strategies that successfully reduce the number of incidents, providing stability for children. However, one risk assessment had not been written for a child despite risks being identified by staff following incidents that took place two weeks before the inspection. Despite this, these risks are known, so the carers can make informed decisions about caring for the child safely. Another child's assessment received from the local authority after the initial placement had not been reviewed effectively by the agency. This assessment highlighted risks that the agency and carer were not aware of.

The number of children going missing from care has significantly reduced in the last year. Carers reported the incidents and took actions in accordance with each child's age and vulnerability. One carer's thoughtful and sensitive response when a child left their home helped the child and, consequently, strengthened the placement. The carer's response was pivotal to the child trusting them. While carers' responses are good, some of the records of children going missing from care lack information. Two records failed to include the circumstances of the child's return, making the records difficult to monitor over time.

The agency's expectations of carers are clear. Regular monitoring of carers' homes ensures that children live in homes that are safe and maintained to a good standard. The agency carries out unannounced visits to carers. If agency staff identify any areas of concern they address them with the carers. This all helps to ensure that the children receive good care that helps to keep them safe.

Recruitment checks demonstrate that carers, staff and panel members are checked prior to appointment. Carers' suitability and parenting capacity are monitored through feedback and regular visits from supervising social workers. The agency

takes appropriate action when there are questions about carers' ongoing suitability. The agency carries out effective annual reviews of the carers that inform its development plans and decisions about their ongoing approval and suitability. Clear decision-making about carers' approval and annual reviews ensure that children are placed with carers who provide consistently good-quality care.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency is managed by cohesive management and staff teams. The manager has been registered with Ofsted since February 2014. The manager, responsible individual and supervising social workers bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the agency. The managers and staff have a shared ethos that helps to make sure that the agency meets its stated aims and objectives. The managers' plans to develop the agency are realistically balanced with maintaining a small bespoke service.

The agency is valued and respected by the carers, who appreciate its size and ethos. A carer said, 'They [the staff] deliver exactly what they promise.' Another carer said, 'The agency is local and reachable and the support that it provides is fantastic. She [the supervising social worker] is exactly what you need.' Overall, carers' feedback about the agency is unreservedly positive. The support that the managers and staff provide for carers helps them to provide stable placements for the children, even during times of challenge. In one case, a child was placed just before Christmas. The supervising social worker made four visits in short succession during the holiday period to support the placement.

The staff are positive about the agency. The size of the agency results in staff who have a comprehensive knowledge of the carers and the children. A child-centred ethos is shared by the managers, staff and carers. The matching process works well, so that the children live with carers who can meet their needs and help them to make good progress. The managers and staff have high aspirations and ambition for children to do well in their placements and later lives.

The agency has developed effective working relationships with external agencies. The agency staff advocate for children and challenge placing authorities when appropriate. Because of this, the care that the children experience meets their individual needs well. Independence planning, including staying put, is given early consideration. This helps to make sure that children are well prepared for adulthood and, when appropriate, can stay in their placements beyond 18 years of age and have the ongoing support that they need.

Carers value the training that they receive, and are keen to attend. They benefit from workshops tailored specifically to children's presenting needs. This training helps them to look after the children effectively. Carers enjoy attending the support groups and feel part of a team. The agency has clear expectations of both carers (when there are two) to attend supervision and training. This is an important part of making sure that the children live in homes in which all of the adults who look after them are well informed and continue to do a good job.

The supervision of carers is child focused and addresses any concerns. The agency staff routinely monitor the records that the carers make about children, to ensure that the records are suitable for children to read, now or in the future. Overall, the agency provides good, structured oversight of carers.

Managers respond appropriately to any significant events. They send notifications of such events in to Ofsted. However, there is sometimes a significant delay in doing this. Lack of timely notification of significant events prevents Ofsted from having sufficient oversight of the service and the experiences of the children.

Appraisals for panel members are not regular and, in some cases, have not taken place for several years. This does not give panel members clear feedback about their roles. Nor does it help the agency to have a clear overview of individual panel members' performance and development needs.

## **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:** SC477026

**Registered provider:** Beams Foster Care and Family Services Limited

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**Responsible individual:** Beryl Sims

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## **Inspectors**

Clive Lucas, social care inspector

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector



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