

Quality Foster Care

Quality Foster Care Limited

1st Floor, Communication House, 134–146 High Road, Benfleet, Essex SS7 5LD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Situated in Essex, Quality Foster Care is a bespoke independent fostering agency that recruits carers locally. There are 20 approved households offering emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements for children of all ages. The agency offers placements to placing authorities in the surrounding geographical area, including London. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 28 children in placement and two young people staying put.

The manager registered with Ofsted in December 2017. There are interim arrangements due to the registered manager's current ill health. A second, experienced manager is in the process of applying to register with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 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 **outstanding**

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:

- The vast majority of children live with their foster carers for one year or more.
- Children attend school or college or receive help to find employment.
- Children receive good emotional support.
- Children receive good help and support to see their families.
- The agency has good links with other agencies, such as the Prince's Trust.
- The agency is good at celebrating individual children's success.
- The agency values feedback from children.
- The agency encourages participation and puts on fun events for the children.
- Complaints and allegations are managed well and sensitively.
- Training for carers is designed to help them to think about the needs of children in their care.
- Supervising social workers are skilled and knowledgeable. They form good relationships with the children.
- The panel offers robust professional challenge to the agency.
- The day-to-day management arrangements are highly effective.
- The directors are proactively involved in running the service.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The annual panel training day (or equivalent) should include the range of staff who work at the agency.
- The content of some recorded information about children is not helpful should any child wish to access information about themselves now or in the future.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering services fostering staff. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 23.10)
- Ensure information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 26.6)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Eighty percent of children linked to this bespoke independent fostering agency live with their foster carers for one year or longer. The stability and continuity of care that are experienced by many children ensure that the clear majority thrive and flourish in their foster placement. Children are welcomed by foster carers' extended family and support networks. This helps children, several of whom live with their brothers and sisters, to experience belonging.

Children receive good help and support to see their families, in accordance with their plans. All children of school age are in education. Input from the education adviser ensures that foster carers understand children's individual education needs and that foster carers feel confident about seeking additional support for the child/children in their care when this is necessary. The registered manager is proactive in establishing relationships with local school staff. She ensures that one member of staff from the agency attends every child's personal education planning meeting. This approach helps to ensure that every child receives robust support to achieve their potential in learning and education.

Older children receive significant help to attend college or to find employment. The agency has good links with other agencies, such as the Prince's Trust. These relationships help to identify alternative pathways for children. The agency's approach to encouraging foster carers to think about their role in preparing children for their futures means that children develop a good range of skills to facilitate successful transitions into independence. The agency supports foster carers to offer staying put arrangements for children in their care.

The agency is proactive in its efforts to get to know and build relationships with individual children. For example, some children like to drop in to the office to talk to the staff. This sets the scene because children's well-being and happiness are at the centre of this agency.

The agency is good at recognising and celebrating achievement, which helps to raise self-esteem. Every child is encouraged to get involved and to influence the planning of agency occasions. For example, children helped to plan the recent service 'academy' awards event, which recognised the individual success of every child in care and the children who foster. This approach nurtures inclusion and encourages children to feel proud of their positive contributions.

Children take part in a range of out-of-school activities. Carers and staff encourage them to develop personal interests. Foster carers are good at encouraging children to try new things and to practise new skills. Supervising social workers are good at helping to ensure that foster carers remain focused on prioritising the needs of the children. This helps to ensure that children's natural ability is recognised and encouraged to develop.

Children receive emotional support. This helps to improve their well-being and mental health. Supervising social workers and foster carers advocate tirelessly on children's behalf to ensure that individual children access formal mental health services. Supervising social workers go above and beyond by, for example, providing direct support to children. The agency has continued to employ the services of a psychologist, who provides consultation and advice to carers and to staff. These arrangements ensure that, across the agency, there is robust understanding and knowledge about the effects of trauma and loss in early childhood.

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

The agency has effective arrangements for speaking to children and ensuring that every child understands how to contact a trusted adult and how to make a complaint. The agency has had few complaints. Nonetheless, each is taken very seriously. When a child makes a complaint, the agency is thorough and responsive. The managers and the supervising social workers address issues and take proactive steps to work in partnership with placing authorities to identify child-centred solutions. If it becomes necessary for children to have to move placements, this happens sensitively.

Few allegations have been made against foster carers. The agency manages these situations well by ensuring that relevant procedures are followed and the relevant agencies have all the information that they need to make decisions. Foster carers receive good advice and have access to independent sources of help if necessary. The agency is transparent and child centred when managing complex situations.

The agency uses an independent source to conduct foster carer household reviews. The annual unannounced visits are carried out by someone other than the allocated supervising social worker. These arrangements provide another layer of safeguarding and help to avoid complacency in keeping children safe from harm.

Overall, the agency does a good job in identifying and predicting risk. Children who are considered to be at risk of exploitation have an individualised assessment that helps to shape discussion between foster carers and supervising social workers about risk and effective strategies to reduce risk. Few children go missing or demonstrate high risk-taking behaviours. The agency works proactively with placing authorities, foster carers and the children to understand behaviour and find pragmatic solutions.

Since the last inspection, the experienced panel chair continues in their role. This offers consistency for foster carers returning to panel, for example, following review. The arrangements for feedback to the agency from the panel are effective and ensure improvements, such as in the content of assessment reports. Initial visits are undertaken by the registered manager, which demonstrates that there is a process of robust scrutiny before stage one of the application process commences. Initial assessments are undertaken by the supervising social workers employed by the agency. This provides continuity for those applicants subsequently approved as foster carers by the long-standing agency decision-maker.

The panel members are suitably experienced and skilled. Annual panel training days provide an opportunity for panel members to remain up to date with current issues in social care. However, the panel members have not attended training with a sufficient range of staff from the agency. While this has no direct impact on children, joint training helps to improve effectiveness.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency currently has two managers. This is because the registered manager has been unwell. The second manager is in the process of registering with Ofsted. Both managers are extremely experienced in working with children in foster care. The arrangements are seamless.

This agency practises its ethos. Both of the directors, one of whom is the responsible individual, continue to be proactively involved in this service. Each director knows each of the children and every foster carer by name. Their respective contributions make a significantly positive difference to the lives of children in foster care. This is because the directors combine previous experience as children of a foster carer and current knowledge about delivering good-quality fostering care, to shape and define the agency for the benefit of children. For example, supervising social workers have low caseloads, which enables them to afford more time to helping foster carers improve outcomes for children.

All foster carers have access to an excellent array of training. Supervising social workers are creative in ensuring that carers access training materials. The directors and managers want the foster carers and the staff to develop their knowledge and understanding. They plan ahead to identify new resources to help carers update on current themes in social care, such as county lines and gang culture. The agency recognises the value in learning.

Since the last inspection, the previous registered manager has retired. However, she continues to add significant value. She uses her experience as a practice educator to support student placements. This arrangement helps to improve the quality of discussion in the wider team about current trends and models of practice in children's social care.

The small but experienced team of supervising social workers receives excellent support from the current management arrangements. Regular one-to-one supervision and reflective group supervision help to ensure that the staff work as one team to deliver excellent-quality support to foster carers.

Routine quality assurance processes ensure effective compliance and oversight of systems across the service. Since the last inspection, the directors have invested in a new electronic recording system. This is a positive measure because the agency is working well to embed a system to help supervising social workers and foster carers to capture children's individual progress. However, samples from some children's written records show that some information is not helpfully documented should a

child wish to have access to any of the information that the agency holds about them now or in the future.

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: SC048508

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Inspector

Rosie Davie, social care inspector



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