

A1 Foster Care

GA1 Management Suite, Technology Court, Bradbury Road, Newton Aycliffe DL5 6DA
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was first registered on 11 May 2017. It is registered as an individual provider. It changed to this status at registration. Previously, the agency had been registered as an organisation. The agency provides short-term and long-term placements for children and young people with a range of needs. At the time of the inspection visit, the agency was providing placements for 29 children and young people and had 24 approved fostering households. The agency's staff team comprises of the registered provider, a registered manager, one senior supervising social worker and two supervising social workers. In addition, the service has an administrator.

Inspection dates: 17 to 21 June 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: 23 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people make good progress in their foster placements following careful matching. The agency provides carers with good support and supervision, which help children and young people to enjoy stability in a safe environment.

Carers spoken to were passionate about their roles and highlighted the strong relationships that they have with their supervising social workers. The relatively small size of the agency leads to a family feel to the service. Carers comments such as 'always available' and 'nothing is too much bother' were heard throughout the inspection visit when talking about social workers and management.

The agency focuses on ensuring that carers receive basic information about children and young people prior to placements being made. However, the placing local authorities do not routinely forward the care plan in a timely manner. Additionally, the agency's processes for escalating its concerns in relation to required documents to the placing social workers are not thorough. This limits the effectiveness of initial information sharing in supporting children and young people to settle in placement.

The agency provides children and young people with good age-appropriate information about being fostered and also how to complain if they are not satisfied. The agency is developing processes for ensuring that the views of children and young people form part of the development of the service.

The progress of the children and young people in terms of their education, health and well-being is monitored using an electronic tracking system. This ensures that any areas which are of concern are identified and addressed quickly.

The agency recruits carers from every walk of life. This inclusive approach helps them to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people who need placements with loving, understanding and caring carers. Children and young people benefit from being part of local communities. Carers' local knowledge and support help to keep children and young people safe and to take part in everyday activities.

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

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

When children and young people do go missing, it is generally for short amounts of time. The carers follow clear procedures for responding to individual missing from home episodes. Carers know their communities well and will routinely search known areas and will contact their local network of supportive friends to ensure that children and young people are kept safe. The agency works closely with other professionals to reduce the risk of harm.

Carers are provided with appropriate safeguarding training to keep children and young people safe. This includes topics such as understanding trauma and attachment, safe-handling and de-escalation skills, as well as understanding challenging behaviour. The agency works with the placing authority to develop strategies to manage the individual behaviours of children and young people. There are supportive relationships between carers and supervising social workers, which ensure that the difficult times in a child's or young person's life are managed safely.

Carers have individual safe caring plans for each child or young person placed with them. They are clear and well written. They detail how care will be provided safely in and out of the home. Children spoken to were clear that they felt safe and listened to. One child stated, 'If you want something done, they [foster carers] will get it done.'

The agency is not always as clear and precise as it should be in the information that it shares with HMCI in safeguarding notifications. However, this is an area of improvement that the leadership and management team is aware of and is addressing.

The safer caring recruitment processes are thorough. Staff and panel members are subject to appropriate suitability checks and a rigorous interview process prior to their appointment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This is a well-managed agency that has established and experienced leadership and management personnel at the forefront of the service. They are visible and effective at a strategic and at an operational level.

This is a small but developing service with clear plans for expansion that do not overburden the current staffing levels. The consultation between staff and management is open and honest. Carers are provided with a forum in which they can express their views in informal coffee mornings and they receive regular supervision to support and advise on the quality of care to children and young people. Supervising social workers make every effort to incorporate the views of children and young people in relation to the care that they receive during their visits to fostering households. Unannounced visits are undertaken as required, which help to ensure that standards of care are maintained and that children and young people make progress.

The agency has an electronic recording system. However, a shortfall has been identified in terms of a lack of consistent headings being used for recorded documents. This is not always identified in the monitoring audits carried out by the agency. The registered manager has started to work with her staff and the relevant electronic system provider to improve this.

Carers are provided with comprehensive training that enables them to provide safe and nurturing care to children and young people. However, not all carers are completing their training, support and development standards within the required

12-month timeframe. This requires improvement to ensure that carers are fully supported to attain the appropriate level of knowledge to support the overall care of children and young people in placement.

The agency's staff team members are experienced and have the necessary skills to provide a good service. The team is small, but supervising social workers have caseloads that allow them to provide good support to their carers as well as to the children and young people. There are development plans to grow placement availability in the North West and recruitment is planned for an additional supervising social worker. This is to ensure that as the agency grows, work continues to be undertaken effectively.

Foster care assessments and subsequent review processes are thorough. The agency has recruited an independent assessor to undertake the assessment of prospective carers. This enables the supervising social workers to focus on support and on the quality of care oversight of their carers, promoting positive outcomes for children and young people in their care.

Since the last full inspection, the leadership and management team has improved the overall thoroughness of the fostering panel membership and decision-making processes. Requirements and recommendations made at the last full inspection have been met.

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 ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under Regulation 6 (3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))	02/08/2019
<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> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that recording is clear and provides the reader with relevant detail in order to understand fully the context of the incident being reported.</p>	02/08/2019

Recommendations

- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.7)
- Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.3)
- Ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.2)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: 1232379

Registered provider: A1 Foster Care

Registered provider address: GA1 Management Suite, Technology Court,
Bradbury Road, Newton Aycliffe DL5 6DA

Responsible individual: Janis Anderson

Registered manager: Barbara Thompson

Telephone number: 07956409651

Email address: jan.anderson@a1fostercare.co.uk

Inspector

Michael Dack, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019