

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides high-quality care. Outcomes for children and young people are very positive. They develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging.

Children and young people develop good levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. A child who was asked about how she felt about her foster carer stated, 'Amazing. I feel like I'm part of the family. We always get lots of hugs. By the way, I don't like seeing us as a foster family. We are just family.'

Children and young people receive personalised care that meets their individual needs. The agency pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity. Children and young people confirmed that they feel listened to. They are aware of how to make complaints, but generally do not do so.

Children and young people are able to influence the development of the agency through good levels of consultation. The agency's 'Children's Ambassadors', who themselves are former children in care, also encourage children and young people to have a voice within the fostering service.

Children and young people benefit from the service's careful placement planning. Introductions between children, young people and their prospective foster carers are sensitively coordinated. This helps to settle children and young people from the outset and enhances placement success.

Unplanned endings are rare. However, managers do not ensure that agreed placements that are outside of foster carers' approval status are managed appropriately or in accordance with the fostering regulations.

Children and young people's learning outcomes are good. Most attend school or college regularly and make good progress from their original starting points. Foster carers are strong advocates for educational success and they are very much involved in promoting this ethos.

Agency staff acknowledge and celebrate children's academic and more general achievements. This acts as further motivation for children and young people to do well.

Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of their physical, emotional and social well-being. Children and young people have excellent access to primary healthcare services and receive advice and support from specialist services when this is required, particularly for children with disabilities and those who have complex health needs.

Communication between the agency and healthcare professionals is consistent, and foster carers and children and young people receive first aid training.

The agency prepares older young people well for adulthood. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the agency's children's services team, which works

closely with older young people to help them become more independent.

A number of young adults remain living with their foster carers in 'Staying Put' arrangements. This allows them to remain living with their foster families and maintain existing relationships as they prepare for adulthood.

Children and young people have contact with their parents, brothers and sisters and others when it is safe for them to do so. The agency manages arrangements for contact carefully, ensuring that these are in the best interests of children and young people. The agency can facilitate supervised contact on the premises, as the office building has safe and appropriate space.

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

The agency protects children from neglect, harm, abuse and bullying. The staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people are central to the agency's work.

The agency ensures that foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children and young people and of the underlying causes of their negative behaviours. The agency has detailed child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers has a strong focus on child protection. This supports their safe care of vulnerable children and young people. Foster families and individual children and young people's safe care policies outline how fostering households will keep children and young people safe. However, managers do not ensure that there are safe care policies and risk assessments for adult parents living in parent and child placements.

Placement plans address children and young people's changing needs and promote strategies that help to reduce risk-taking behaviour. Staff complete risk assessments and these are kept updated.

Staff, foster carers and children and young people receive useful training that helps keep children and young people safe. For example, recently children and young people have attended workshops focused on internet safety and bullying.

In the last 12 months, there have been incidents of children and young people going missing, being restrained, and suspicions of children and young people's involvement in criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation. In each case, the agency has acted appropriately and effectively to help keep children and young people safe.

Investigations into allegations are prompt and appropriate. Managers ensure that their communication with safeguarding specialists, such as designated officers and the police, are regular and effective.

Managers ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of core staff.

Foster carers receive good training and written guidance that helps them to keep children and young people safe. Foster carers and staff regularly attend multi-agency professionals' meetings convened to address children and young people's risky behaviour. Managers monitor, and have excellent overview and insight into, all

safeguarding incidents. These are managed very well.

Foster carers' homes are safe and secure. Staff routinely conduct two unannounced visits to each fostering household every year. They conduct checks that ensure that homes are well maintained, comfortable and that there are no health and safety concerns.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are ambitious and strive for continual improvement; many aspects of the agency's leadership and management are sound. The registered manager is experienced and qualified and she receives support from the responsible individual and one other director.

The agency is financially viable. The agency's business plan supports continued improvement. This includes plans to recruit more foster carers and, in upcoming months, the introduction of an improved IT system and database.

Managers' communication with other professionals is effective. Stakeholders, both within and external to the agency, identified managers as being visible, approachable and highly skilled. This is also the overwhelming view of foster carers. A foster carer said of the management team, 'The managers are nice people. They're always approachable. It's a family, we feel like we grew with them.'

Foster carers said that the quality of the training and support that they receive is another strength of the agency. A foster carer said, 'Support is brilliant here. Everyone's friendly, they're always in contact to help sort things out. The support groups are useful and important.'

The agency provides foster carers with excellent training. The training programme is extensive and of a high quality. It equips foster carers with good knowledge and skills. This helps them to care for children and young people safely.

Members of the staff team are equally complimentary about the management of the agency. A social worker commented, 'I was really impressed with my induction, all the necessary equipment was already in place. I've never been so well supported by managers and a business support team.' Another staff member said, 'If I didn't like what I was doing, I wouldn't be here. We're like a family, we're all in it together.'

There are clear lines of accountability. Managers and staff are clear about staff roles and responsibilities. Social work staff are qualified and experienced. Staff receive excellent support. However, some individuals, noticeably independent social workers, do not receive regular, formal supervision, which is recorded.

Some staff say that staff training opportunities require review, as training does not always meet their professional development needs. Managers consistently conduct staff annual appraisals.

The entire team is skilled, highly motivated and industrious. Team members share similar enthusiasm, drive and ambition for the development of the service as managers and leaders do.

The statement of purpose is a clear and comprehensive document that outlines well

the aims and objectives of the service, its ethos and services provided. The two children's guides are creative, easy-to-read written summaries. However, neither guide is available in formats accessible by children or young people who use different modes of communication.

The agency's fostering panel operates effectively. The panel undertakes appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective.

Staff complete foster carer assessments comprehensively. Foster carers' annual reviews are presented at panel every year, or more so if required. This promotes the regular review of foster carers' suitability to continue to care for 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>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.</p> <p>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable, and seek and take into account the views of—</p> <p>the foster parent,</p> <p>any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child’s age and understanding), and</p> <p>any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.</p> <p>At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—</p> <p>the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable, and</p> <p>the terms of the foster parent’s approval continue to be appropriate. (Regulation 28(1)(2)(3)(4)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, that foster carers responsible for parent and child placements are approved by the agency to provide these placements.</p>	01/10/2019
<p>A fostering service provider must not approve a person who has been approved as a foster parent by another fostering service provider where that approval has not been</p>	01/10/2019

<p>terminated.</p> <p>A fostering service provider must not approve X as a foster parent unless—</p> <p>they have completed their assessment of X’s suitability, and the fostering panel has considered the application.</p> <p>A fostering service provider must, in deciding whether to approve X as a foster parent and as to the terms of any approval, take into account the recommendation of the fostering panel.</p> <p>No member of the fostering panel may take part in any decision made by a fostering service provider under paragraph (3).</p> <p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent they must—</p> <p>give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and</p> <p>enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the "foster care agreement"). (Regulation 27(5)(b))</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and are enabled from to time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform. (Regulation 21(4)(a)(b))</p>	01/10/2019
<p>The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide,</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and</p> <p>if the children’s guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child’s age and understanding). (Regulation 4(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular, that the children’s guides are made available in formats that include symbols and/or pictorial cues.</p>	01/10/2019

Recommendations

- Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused. For foster carers who offer placements to

disabled children, this includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children. (NMS 4.6) In particular, that safe care policies are devised for adults in parent and child placements.

- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (NMS 4.5) In particular, that risk assessments are completed for adults in parent and child placements.

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: SC036587

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, social care inspector



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