

Break Fostering Service

Break

Schofield House, Spar Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR6 6BX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Break Fostering Service is run by a charitable organisation. The fostering agency provides therapeutic foster placements to children and young people aged between seven and 18, as well as parent-and-child placements. The agency provides long-term placements, some with built-in respite care. The agency has 13 fostering households, which are providing care for 11 children. The manager has been registered since January 2019.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 February 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 14 May 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Shortfalls in the leadership and management of the agency and the help and protection of children mean that, despite the positive support that the children receive from the agency staff, the fostering agency has not yet reached the overall expectations to be judged as good.

The children live in safe and caring homes in which they receive individualised care that meets their particular needs. The wraparound support and therapy programme provided by the agency help the children to understand and begin to come to terms with their personal histories. A placing social worker said that the agency provides 'brilliant support' to children and their carers.

The placement of children with foster carers is well planned. As a result, children usually stay with their foster carers for many years. They progress into adulthood with the continuing support and guidance of their carers. The gradual introductions help the children to settle and begin to develop relationships with their carers. The children talked about the joy of being one of the family and building happy memories. They enjoy being able to snuggle with their carer to watch television, go horse riding or on holiday. One child particularly enjoys cuddling and taking their dog for walks. The children enjoy normal childhood friendships and have, on occasion, been able to enjoy a holiday with their friend.

Many of the fostering households provide solo placements that enable the carers to focus on the complex needs of an individual child. Some children have benefited from the opportunity to develop brother and sister type relationships with older young people also living within the foster household. As a result, the children have experienced positive role modelling from older peers. However, the decision process for matching foster carers with the children and when children are placed with other children is not clearly documented. This means that opportunities to understand gaps in matching and how they have been addressed or what has made the fostering arrangements successful are potentially missed.

The children said that they know that their carers are always emotionally available. They develop close relationships with their foster families and sometimes choose to call their foster carers 'Mum and Dad'. The children make good progress because of the good help and support that they receive. One child said, 'My carers are amazing. It is just so lovely and natural. Because of them, I am more confident, and my behaviour has changed.'

The children receive the appropriate health and education support that they need to succeed. The agency appropriately challenges the virtual school and works in close partnership to ensure that the children have suitable education arrangements. A virtual school headteacher said that the carers have gone 'above and beyond'.

New carers are welcomed, prepared and assessed effectively. The agency provides new carers with therapeutic parenting training and therapeutic support. The carers feel very well supported. When foster carers have separated, the focus has fully remained on the children's needs while also supporting foster carers. As a result, the children and their foster carers continue to maintain important roles in each other's lives.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

There is no information to suggest that the children are not receiving suitable help and support. However, there is not sufficiently robust monitoring to ensure that policies and procedures to safeguard children and their foster carers are consistently and effectively implemented.

The carers and agency staff work in close partnership to help the children deal with emotional distress and to make positive decisions about their life. Foster carers are trained in therapeutic parenting and the use of de-escalation approaches. As a result of some children's unpredictable and unsafe behaviours, some carers have used physical restraint. There is no information to suggest that the carers undertake this lightly or with anything but the intent to keep themselves and the child safe. However, the agency has not identified that using a 'cuddle' to hold a young child against their will is a form of physical restraint. As a result, there is no clear and transparent written guidance or behaviour management plan to safeguard the child and the carers.

Risk management plans do not always provide suitably current and transparent guidance for foster carers and agency staff, as they are not updated after each significant incident to reflect emerging risks.

Agency health and safety checks have on one occasion failed to identify potential hazards relating to the storage of medication.

Agency staff have worked effectively in partnership with other professionals and ensured a robust response to potential safeguarding incidents. However, not all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding, receive suitable training in safer caring. Not all members of the fostering household are consistently clear about what they should report and how they should report safeguarding allegations against household members.

Risk-taking behaviours are low, and the children's complex behaviours decrease from the time when they move in with their carers. Children very rarely go missing and, when they do, their foster carers ensure their safe return. The agency works in partnership to ensure that the child's placing authority conducts a return-home interview. This means that opportunities to understand patterns and trends and aspects of risk are independently explored.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The manager has been registered since January 2019. However, temporary management arrangements were in place for some of this time. The manager understands the strengths of the agency but not some of the areas for development. Internal quality assurance mechanisms have failed to identify and address the shortfalls that were identified during this inspection.

There is not enough scrutiny to ensure that staff recruitment is conducted in accordance with the principles of safer recruitment on every occasion. There is no formal system to check qualified social workers' continuing registration. Furthermore, on one occasion, no written reference was taken up from the most relevant recent substantive childcare employer. Therefore, there was potential for relevant information about the applicant's suitability to be missed.

There has not been a strategic approach to recruitment. The majority of the staff who work in the fostering service do not have previous fostering experience. The staff have not consistently ensured that all the agency's work has been undertaken in accordance with fostering regulations and best practice.

The children's guide and information for prospective carers contain out-of-date information for children and carers. The provider has not sent a copy of the new statement of purpose to Ofsted or ensured that it is available on the fostering agency's website. The complaints procedure does not detail the complainants' right to contact Ofsted, and the foster care agreement does not accurately state the carers' terms of approval. This means that children, carers, commissioners and Ofsted are unable to easily access relevant and accurate information.

There is not clear guidance on and a consistent understanding between foster carers, the staff and the manager of the information that carers should share with the organisation and when. Neither is there clear guidance on the safe storage of prescribed medications. As a result, the organisation has not always been made aware of incidents, such as when physical intervention has been used and when carers have booked respite directly with other carers. Therefore, the agency has not always known where children are sleeping or been able to ensure that physical intervention has been used appropriately.

There is a lack of cohesive strategy for the quality of recording and storage of records. Staff supervision records lack detail in respect of case management and the oversight of the risks and vulnerabilities that children and their carers face. Foster carers' monthly supervision visits are not consistently documented effectively to show that suitable challenge takes place when foster carers' actions do not meet the agency's expectations. The staff do not make consistently effective use of the centralised database. It is sometimes difficult to quickly locate required information or understand important aspects of care, such as when children have been staying with respite carers outside their main home.

Panel arrangements are strong and work as an effective gatekeeping process. The new, diverse panel membership enables the panel to draw from a wider range of professional knowledge and life experiences. Panel members benefit from suitable training and appraisal arrangements, and new members have the opportunity to observe a panel.

The small, enthusiastic and child-focused staff team feels valued and well supported by the manager. The staff know each of the children and the fostering households well. The staff are keen to develop their skills and knowledge but require suitable support and guidance.

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 compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service ('the statement of purpose').</p> <p>The fostering service provider must place a copy on their website if they have one. (Regulation 3(1)(2))</p> | 01/04/2020 |
| <p>The fostering service provider must keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, and notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4(a)(b))</p> | 01/04/2020 |
| <p>The registered person must establish a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency.</p> <p>The copy of the procedure must include the name, address (including email address), and telephone number of the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 18(1)(3)(a))</p> | 01/04/2020 |
| <p>The fostering service provider must maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. (Regulation 22(1))</p> <p>In particular, maintain a clear children's register to show which fostering household children are placed in. Furthermore, maintain a clear record that details when and where children have been placed when not with their main foster carers.</p> | 02/03/2020 |
| <p>If a fostering service provider decide to approve X as a foster parent, they must give X notice in writing specifying any terms on which the approval is given, and enter into a written agreement with X covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (the 'foster care agreement'). (Regulation 27(5)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that the foster care agreement accurately states the terms of approval.</p> | 01/04/2020 |
| <p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals</p> | 30/05/2020 |

and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35(1))

In particular, ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service to ensure that the service operates within all relevant regulations and standards.

Recommendations

- Foster carers provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 3.2)

In particular, provide foster carers who need to use physical intervention with appropriate training and guidance. Furthermore, monitor the use of any physical intervention.

- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 4.5)
- Medicines kept in the foster home are stored safely and are accessible only by those for whom they are intended. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 6.9)
- The fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This includes CRB checks. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 19.2)
- Appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding, and ensures that foster carers understand how safer caring principles should be applied in a way which meets the needs of individual children. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 20.9)
- Foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources, which cover policies, procedures (including with regard to allegations), guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details. This information is updated regularly. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 21.10)
- Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). 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: SC430757

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