

Break Fostering Service

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

Assurance visit

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 10 children. The manager has been registered since January 2019.

Visit dates: 11 to 12 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 3 February 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

There are 10 children living with foster carers in this agency. One child recently moved into his new foster carers' home.

Children are doing well in their foster homes, and some are doing very well. Placing social workers are very pleased with children's progress.

The fostering agency has ensured that there is specialist support for children and advice for carers when needed. This is helping children to form good attachments with their foster carers and is meeting the children's needs, including their emotional needs. Some children have been able to develop closer attachments to their foster carers during the first national lockdown period.

Foster carers help children to prepare for moves into and out of their foster homes. This helps children to have a positive start in their new homes and to be able to move on successfully.

During the first lockdown, some children continued in formal education and others stayed at home. When children were not in school, their foster carers helped them to maintain a routine and continue learning. One child has recently started at school again after a year out of education. This is a major achievement for him.

During the first lockdown, the agency used virtual platforms so that children could continue to see their families even if this was not possible face to face. One child was able to use video calls to play card games with his mother. Facilitating this communication has helped the children to maintain important relationships and get support from their families. One child's sister, who is not placed with the agency, has been able to take part in activities organised by the agency, so that the children's relationship could be maintained.

Some carers have kept going and provided caring homes for children when, placing social workers said, many would not have been able to. In one case, a brother and sister have been able to continue living together because of the strength of their placement with foster carers. Both children's needs have been clearly identified, despite the potential for one to overshadow the other.

The safety of children

Supervising social workers ensure that children's risk assessments are updated following any incidents. The risk assessments reflect the vulnerabilities of the children and identify how foster carers can reduce the risks. This is supported, in

some cases, by training to help carers understand areas of risk, such as exploitation. This helps to keep children safe.

There has only been one incident of a child going missing since the last inspection. The supervising social worker has recognised the potential for the child to be subject to exploitation. This has been included in the child's risk assessment and the foster carer has undertaken training on exploitation. The training was online, so that it could take place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the last inspection, all foster carers have been given medication cabinets. Supervising social workers check on the storage of medication during their visits to foster homes. This helps to protect children from having inappropriate access to medicine.

One set of foster carers had some actions identified as part of their review and return to the foster panel after an investigation. Not all of these actions were completed in a timely way. While the COVID-19 pandemic has limited face-to-face training, the agency has not considered other ways of addressing these actions. Because of this, the foster carers have not had this opportunity for learning and development to help them to work well with other agencies and provide good care for children.

In one case, an allegation from a child, that he had been hit by a foster carer, was not passed on to the agency in a timely way [by the foster carer]. Also, when the information was passed on, it was not referred to or discussed with the designated officer. This prevented an independent overview of the allegation, and the child's voice was not heard and responded to.

Leaders and managers

Six requirements and seven recommendations were made at the last inspection. Managers have worked well towards meeting these. Only one requirement is repeated following this visit. While foster carers' terms of approval are included in several foster carers' foster care agreements, they are not in all of them.

The registered manager regularly monitors the agency's activities. She uses the monitoring to identify areas of development and how they will be met. This is leading to improvements at the agency.

There continues to be a focus on children and their welfare. This is a small agency, and supervising social workers have caseloads that allow them to support foster carers well and ensure that children's needs are met.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular the lockdown periods, supervising social workers have continued to support foster carers. Supervising social workers have kept in contact in various ways, including video calls, phone calls and meeting with foster carers to 'walk and talk'. In one case, a respite placement was used to support a placement that would otherwise have been at risk of breakdown.

Managers have used video calls to keep in touch with the supervising social workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managers have also used video calls to enable staff meetings and practice discussions to continue.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that any allegations that a foster carer has hit a child are passed to the agency in a timely way and referred to the designated officer.</p>	31/12/2020
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>This particularly refers to ensuring that any actions identified after a foster carer has had their approval reviewed, following a safeguarding referral, are completed.</p>	31/12/2020
<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>	31/12/2020

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC430757

Registered provider: Break

Registered provider address: Schofield House, 1 Spar Road, Norwich, Norfolk
NR6 6BX

Responsible individual: Rachel Leslie

Registered manager: Sarah Green-Plumb

Inspectors

Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector
Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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