

Barnardo's Fostering South East

Barnardo's House, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency provides emergency short- and long-term placements for children and young people who are referred by local authorities.

At the time of the visit, the agency supports 17 fostering households, which are caring for 19 children and young people.

The manager registered on 8 July 2020.

Visit dates: 17 to 18 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 13 May 2019

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

Children make progress while living with their foster families. They develop, and benefit from, trusting relationships with foster carers. Carers provide stability, security, support and good-quality care to children. Children seek help, advice and guidance from their foster carers when they are worried or upset. Children's longer-term plans are well considered and prepared for, with several young people remaining with their carers into adulthood.

Foster carers support children to maintain relationships with their family and friends. There has been good consideration of individual needs and wishes to ensure that children are central to any arrangements made. When concerns regarding contact arrangements arise, these are shared with the placing authority and matters are reviewed.

Children's views are regularly received, and they are included in meetings, discussions and plans about their care. The children's guide is not available in different versions that are suitable for different ages or abilities. When a new placement is considered, children can meet a potential foster carer and their views are explored and considered prior to plans being made. This has had a positive impact on children, who feel involved in the process. Leaders and managers also involve children in their recruitment and training processes of foster carers.

Foster carers have supported children well through the pandemic. They have helped children to make sense of the situation and adjust to changes that have occurred. Children's plans are regularly reviewed, and placement reviews occur when concerns arise. Children are well supported by their foster carers to meet their emotional and physical health needs. They can access a variety of therapeutic support, which helps them to explore their feelings and make sense of their previous and current experiences. Strategies are given to foster carers that enable them to be better equipped to support children who have experienced trauma.

All children access full-time education and are well supported to access training or seek employment. Foster carers have supported children's ongoing education and learning through varied home learning activities and outings.

The safety of children

Children feel safe and secure while living with their foster carers and each have a trusted adult they confide in.

The agency's staff have improved their matching processes through a more effective system and consideration of children's needs. Some risks highlighted within the

matching processes are not thoroughly explored in risk assessments and plans. Specifically, risks associated with exploitation and children going missing from care. Plans lack detail and clear practical advice and guidance to enable foster carers to consistently manage and respond to risk. Social workers have a good understanding of risk and concerns and they explore these with foster carers, but this is not evidenced in plans.

When concerns regarding a child's behavior arise, multi-disciplinary placement planning meetings consider how best to support the child and foster carer. The support provided has helped to stabilise placements.

Managers and staff report safeguarding concerns and allegations to others promptly. They did not notify Ofsted of one significant event that occurred, but they did ensure that it was referred to the appropriate statutory organisation so it was explored and responded to. Managers utilise findings and recommendations from internal investigations and reviews to inform and develop future practice.

Leaders and managers

There has been a great deal of change in the leadership, management and staffing of the agency. A new responsible individual was appointed in May 2020 and the manager registered in July 2020. This is in addition to a new staff team in the agency, where there continues to be several staff vacancies. Leaders and managers are addressing this through a recruitment plan and the use of independent social workers.

Leaders and managers have implemented several actions and plans to address the previous requirements and recommendations. Due to a variety of factors, including the impact of the pandemic and changes in the staff team, more work is required to ensure that they fully embed change into practice and achieve the desired outcomes.

Staff know children and foster carers well and work collaboratively to ensure that they apply a consistent approach that supports them. They are child focused and consider the individual holistic needs of children. There has been some impact of staff turnover, but this has been well managed through thoughtful practice. Children report that they have positive and supportive interactions with the agency.

The agency has continued to operate as usual during the pandemic. They have made arrangements to ensure that panel and other key functions have continued as required. Some amendments to the health assessment process of prospective carers were needed for a period. However, these have now reverted to the original process.

Staff and foster carers have been well supported through regular and effective supervision, performance management, team meetings and virtual coffee mornings. They report having good access to the manager, which allows for good case discussion and reflection. Staff and foster carers can access online training that equips them for their roles. Foster carers have completed their required training,

support and development standards workbook but some have not maintained their mandatory training requirements. The agency has started to implement a full training programme that focuses on the impact of childhood trauma and the use of therapeutic approaches with children.

Foster carer household reviews occur regularly. This year, each of them have been presented at panel. The agency uses an independent reviewing officer for these. The panel is newly formed and is now a fostering and adoption panel which is made up of a diverse group of experienced people. They provide the required additional scrutiny, oversight and quality assurance to matters presented to them.

The manager has a clear view of the agency's strengths and weaknesses. Plans are in place to address these, although these are not all reflected in the agency's action plan. The agency has formed good professional relationships with other organisations and services, which has a direct positive impact on children and their plans.

Leaders and managers have responded to complaints and informed the complainant of the outcome. Managers have used lessons learned to develop and improve practice.

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 specifically relates to ensuring that risk assessments are reliably completed and contain strategies to minimise risk.</p>	1 January 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that foster carers complete both their mandatory training and the training,</p>	1 January 2021

support and development standards for foster care within appropriate timescales.	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the purposes of the fostering service, having regard to the size of the fostering service, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by it. (Regulation 19 (a))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that vacant posts are filled.</p>	1 January 2021

Recommendations

- Where a child requires it, the guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, e.g. Makaton, pictures, tape recording, translation into another language. (Fostering Services: National minimum standard 16.6)
- The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend (Fostering Services: National minimum standard 29.1)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: SC043552

Registered provider: Barnardo's

Registered provider address: Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, ILFORD, Essex IG6 1QG

Responsible individual: Charanjit Kang

Registered manager: Carol Norcott

Inspectors

Amanda Maxwell, Her Majesty's Inspector
Anne-Marie Davies, Social Care Inspector

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