

# Anglia Fostering Agency

Anglia Fostering Agency Limited

1st Floor, 12 Meridian Way, Meridian Business Park, Norwich NR7 0TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency registered in 2010 and is owned by a private company. The agency has its office base in Norfolk and a sub-office in the East Midlands. It recruits, trains and supports foster carers across East Anglia and the East of England region. The agency provides a range of placements including short-, medium- and long-term care and permanency for all age groups. It also provides therapeutic placements and parent-and-child placements. The agency has 53 fostering households providing placements for 73 children.

A longstanding experienced and suitably qualified registered manager is in post.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

### Inspection dates: 26 to 30 April 2021

**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:** 26 February 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children receive care from foster carers who are committed to helping them to achieve good outcomes. The agency has a family feel and provides children with a strong sense of community. Trusting relationships develop between staff, foster carers and the children. A particular strength of this agency is that carers receive guidance from a therapist who is employed by the agency. As a result, foster carers are highly resilient and have good insight into providing care for children in the context of their difficult histories.

Children make good progress. One child, who could not speak English when he came to live with his foster carers, is enrolled on a college course in welding. Another child, who was unable to read, has made significant progress with his literacy skills. A foster carer described a supervising social worker as going 'above and beyond' to secure educational provision for a child who had not been attending school. Some children go to university and make exceptional progress from their starting points. All children are encouraged to achieve their individual goals. Providing good-quality educational support to children helps them to reach their full potential.

Many of the children live with their foster carers long term. This helps children to develop a strong sense of belonging. One child who came to England from overseas and has no family in this country is fully included in all aspects of his foster family's life. This child said that he wants to stay with his foster carers forever. His carers are advocating on his behalf with a claim for asylum. Some children can continue living with their foster carers after they are 18 in staying-put arrangements. When children reach independence, they are encouraged to keep in touch with their foster carers and with the agency. Some foster carers continue to provide guidance and resources to children after they have moved on, just like a good parent would.

Consultation groups and activity days provide opportunities for children's views to be listened to and acted on. Children are encouraged to attend and contribute to their review meetings. Children know how to complain and can identify a trusted adult to talk to. A welcome box is given to children when they arrive at their foster home. This contains information about who to contact if they have any worries. Profiles, including photographs of foster carers, in a child-friendly format help child to prepare for and settle into their new homes. These measures help to reassure children about living with a new family.

Support groups provide carers with opportunities to learn from each other and to share their experiences. New carers are welcomed and given high levels of support both during and after the assessment process. Some carers have transferred into the agency with children already living with them. These carers feel well supported and have benefited from regular contact with the agency during the assessment process. Foster carers hold the support that they receive from the agency in high regard.

Good-quality support and supervision help carers to cope with the additional demands of family life and prevent unplanned endings.

Children are supported to keep in touch with their families. Foster carers give children photographic records of their childhoods. Children's plans for visiting those who are important to them are prioritised, even when children live a long way away from their families. Visiting family members helps children to continue to feel a sense of connection to people who are important to them.

Foster carers are provided with respite care when it is in the child's best interests. When placements are offered to new children, there is careful matching. However, when children move from one agency carer to another, decisions on matching are not documented. This means that it is not clear if all the children's needs, including those already living in the household, have been fully considered.

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

Detailed risk assessments and safe care plans help foster carers understand the steps that they need to take to keep children safe. Detailed information is available to carers before a child moves in, and when risks change the plans are updated. Those children who are at risk are placed on an internal 'at risk register'. This enables children who are particularly vulnerable to be closely monitored by managers and for additional resources to be put in place quickly to address vulnerabilities.

Children are protected from bullying and discrimination. Foster carers are provided with up-to-date information on dangers in the community. For example, email updates are sent to foster carers when new online trends that may pose a risk to children are identified. Adapting information and advice to carers as new risks emerge means that adults can take quick and effective action to minimise harm.

Children rarely go missing. This is because children feel safe in their foster homes and build strong and trusting relationships with their foster carers. A clear policy gives carers and staff instructions on what to do if a child goes missing from their foster home. There is an effective out-of-hours service. Foster carers are confident that there is always someone available to talk to from the agency both night and day.

Children are seen alone by supervising social workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, unannounced visits were undertaken remotely. Video tours of accommodation provided reassurance that children were being cared for safely and that their living conditions are suitable. When the pandemic restrictions eased, staff returned to visiting foster families in their homes. Adapting practice and using remote technology provided assurance that children were being cared for safely when restrictions prevented visits to fostering households.

Children are given information on topics such as bullying, internet safety and county lines. Carers receive specific training in these areas. When group training is not possible, carers receive one-to-one training. Some foster carers with a professional

background in health, education and youth offending use their knowledge to safeguard children. For example, a foster carer who has a background in working with people who present with sexually harmful behaviours used her experience to manage these complex risks. When carers have relevant experience and training, they have the information that they need to respond to risks well.

Children who are exploring their individual identity are provided with sensitive responses from foster carers and opportunities to talk openly about their feelings and fears. Foster carers understand how to support children with identity issues sensitively and this helps to protect children's emotional well-being.

Managing behaviour in the context of children's previous trauma is central to the ethos of the agency. Restraint is discouraged. A therapist guides carers on successful behaviour management and de-escalation strategies. Carers put the skills that they learn in training into practice. Children have clear and consistent boundaries that contribute to a feeling of security.

Regular information sharing between professionals helps to keep children safe. Investigations into suspicions of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies in accordance with statutory guidance. Support is given to foster carers who are under investigation. Sometimes, the agency employs independent investigators to look into allegations of harm. On one occasion, some concerns about a foster carer were not presented to panel. Failure to provide full information in annual review reports prevents the fostering panel from making decisions about foster carers' continued suitability for approval.

Children have access to local health services when they need them. However, at the time of the inspection, arrangements for the safe storage of prescribed medication in a parent-and-child placement were not agreed with the foster carers, nor were they being monitored by the agency. The agency took immediate steps to rectify this shortfall during the inspection and has put in place measures to give foster carers clear guidance around medication storage.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Managers have ambitious vision for and high expectations of the quality of care that they provide to children. The longstanding registered manager is committed to the organisation. Staff and foster carers are positively engaged and compliment the commitment of the management team to providing good-quality care to children. The agency is adequately staffed by an experienced team. Caseloads are manageable, which enables supervising social workers the time that they need to meet the needs of foster carers and children.

Systems are in place for tracking children's progress. Managers understand areas in which children may need additional resources to support their development. These resources and enhanced services are provided to children when required.

Staff say that they feel valued and that their work is recognised. Regular supervision and appraisals mean that there are opportunities to review and reflect on practice.

When weaknesses are identified, effective action is taken. For example, lessons learned following an investigation were reflected on by managers and findings from the investigation were shared with the team. Learning from serious case reviews is discussed in team meetings to develop practice.

Commissioners are positive about the quality of care provided. When other agencies are not effective, managers escalate issues appropriately to ensure that children's needs are met. Good-quality professional relationships with placing authorities mean that children's plans are regularly reviewed and decisions are made in children's best interests.

Equality and diversity is promoted. Panel members are recruited with a range of relevant experience, including a care-experienced adult. The panel chair is experienced and a new agency decision-maker has been appointed. This allows for effective external scrutiny of agency decisions.

Systems are in place for management oversight of placement moves. However, on one occasion, a written agreement to an exemption was not obtained from the local authority decision-maker before moving two children into a household where two children were living. The move took the carers over the maximum number of children.

## 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>A person may exceed the usual fostering limit if he is exempted from it by the local authority within whose area he lives. (Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 (4) (1))</p> <p>This specifically relates to the placement of more than three children with a foster carer when those children are not related.</p>	2 June 2021

### Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that panel reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. This particularly relates to ensuring that panel receives full information in annual review reports following allegations against foster carers. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 13.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. This particularly relates to situations when children are moved between foster carers who foster for this agency. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 15.1)

### 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:** SC406969

**Registered provider:** Anglia Fostering Agency Limited

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## **Inspector**

Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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