

# Break Fostering Service

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency is run by a charitable organisation. It provides therapeutic foster placements for children aged between three and 18, as well as parent and child placements. The agency provides long-term placements, some with built-in respite care. The agency has 12 fostering households, which are providing care for nine children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in January 2019.

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.

We last visited this setting on 12 November 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on our website.

### Inspection dates: 10 to 14 May 2021

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 3 February 2020

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Foster carers form strong, therapeutic relationships with children. These relationships underpin some children's progress. The minutes from one child's statutory review highlight that his carers have provided him with a secure base, that he has been able to trust them and this was the start of his recovery.

Some children are doing well in their education. Those who struggle with education are supported by their foster carers, who advocate for them when necessary. One child was home schooled during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions as this was considered the best option for her. This individual approach has helped her to make good progress. All children in the agency are in education.

Foster carers and the agency staff provide good emotional support for children. Some children have therapeutic sessions, some are doing life-story work and some readily approach their foster carers for emotional warmth. This all helps to make sure that children's emotional needs are well met.

The agency staff and foster carers listen to children's views and take them seriously. One child's statutory review was moved, at her request, to a time that suited her better. The placing social worker for another child recognised that his foster carers could accept that the child had his own views and support him, even when they disagreed with their views. Taking children's views seriously enables them to have some involvement in their daily and longer-term plans.

Children maintain good relationships with their families. Some can keep in touch with their brothers and sisters. In some cases, their brothers and sisters, while not fostered with Break, are able to take part in activities organised by the agency. Foster carers support children to see their families and help them to deal with any issues that arise as a result.

Some children go from their main carers to support carers for planned breaks. The agency manages this sensitively with good introductions and communication. Children always go to the same support carers and have good relationships with them. It is like going to a family friend or relative and is not seen as a break for the main carers because of the demands of caring for the child. This helps to support children in their foster homes without them feeling blame.

Supervising social workers work with foster carers to improve their record-keeping so that the records are likely to provide a helpful and sensitive account of children's lives that they can refer to in the future. The supervising social workers do not currently encourage children to either read their records or be involved in writing them. While it is good that social workers are thinking about how helpful children's records can be in the future, they are missing opportunities to involve and inform children in the present.

Good planning and introductions help children to successfully move into foster homes. In one case, the way that a child moved out of the home was not supportive. After an unplanned ending, the management of his move was not good. Although the agency recognised this after the event, the child's experiences of moving on were worse because of how it was managed.

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

Children see their foster carers as trusted adults and these relationships help to keep them safe. The positive relationships that children enjoy with their carers mean that they can talk to them about any worries they have. These relationships enable honest conversations to take place with children about their safety, including about healthy relationships.

Risk assessments are clear and individual to each child and allow children to take age-appropriate risks. As a result, children can enjoy unsupervised time in the community and at home. There has only been one incident of a child going missing from their foster home over the past 12 months. Following this incident, the foster carers helped to establish a multi-agency plan and ensured that the child had access to the additional support services that were identified for them.

The agency provides lots of support to help foster carers respond in the most helpful way when children's behaviour is challenging. Foster carers attend de-escalation training and receive individual support from the agency's therapy team. Foster carers also benefit from links with the organisation's wider service, including its family centre and residential short-break service for disabled children, which provides them with individualised strategies for supporting the children they are caring for. Foster carers and social workers have seen a reduction in incidents for some children and have observed children as more settled and emotionally contained with their foster carers. One placing social worker highlighted how the carer had 'stuck with' the child throughout very challenging times.

Children are helped to be safe online. Supervising social workers and foster carers make sure that children understand what is expected of them when using social media, and, if appropriate, the reasons why adults are monitoring the use of their mobile phones and other devices.

Foster carers are trained in subjects that help them to keep children safe. This includes training in managing self-harming behaviour, radicalisation and exploitation, and safeguarding. There are examples of foster carers speaking confidently to children about county lines, knife crime and sexually exploitative relationships.

Foster carers valued a recent session delivered by the designated officer. The agency now returns all foster carers who have been subject of an allegation back to panel for a review following the outcome of any investigation. This allows independent scrutiny of the foster carers' capacity to continue to foster. Some carers spoke about good support from the agency following an allegation. One fostering household raised that they did not feel supported well.

Foster carers know how to share safeguarding concerns. Foster carer agreements make clear the agency's expectation that any safeguarding incidents are reported promptly. The manager notifies Ofsted of safeguarding incidents when needed. This allows appropriate monitoring of the agency's safeguarding practices.

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

The registered manager has developed links with a consultant and a mentor to help her to develop her knowledge and practice. She is aware of the progress that children are making and monitors the operation of the agency. This all helps her to promote good care and outcomes for children.

The agency is well staffed for the number of carers. Consequently, the agency can provide effective support and help carers to look after children well.

The agency is child centred. The registered manager and staff use disruption meetings and specially called meetings with local authorities to generate learning and improvement. The registered manager has addressed the issues raised at the last inspection and the assurance visit.

The registered manager and staff challenge other agencies when they need to, to advocate for and get the best for children. If there are disagreements with other agencies, the registered manager actively seeks to get these resolved. This helps to ensure effective joint working in children's best interests.

Annual reviews of foster carers are generally thorough and provide good information for decisions about their continued suitability to be approved as foster carers. However, in one case, a review report was presented to panel without an update covering significant recent events. This lack of complete and up-to-date information reduces the effectiveness of decision-making and safeguards for children.

The agency has a panel with an experienced panel chairperson and experienced panel members. However, overall, the panel lacks diversity and members with specific knowledge and experience, such as someone with experience of being in care. The agency is aware of the need to address this.

# 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>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) (4)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that reports are fully updated.</p>	30 June 2021

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that where children are leaving the foster family, they are supported during the transition to their new placement, to independent living or to their parental home. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 11.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider. Specifically, this relates to having a more diverse representation on the panel. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 14.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 26.6)

## **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

**Registered provider:** Break

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

**Responsible individual:** Rachel Leslie

**Registered manager:** Sarah Green-Plumb

**Telephone number:** 01603 670100

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## **Inspectors**

Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector  
Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

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