

Regional Foster Families – East Anglia

Regional Foster Families Limited

Bowthorpe Hall, The Chestnut Suite, Bowthorpe Hall Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR5 9AA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Regional Foster Families is a privately owned independent fostering agency. It has six offices covering locations across the UK. The registered branch of the agency has carers located mostly in Norfolk and Suffolk. Those carers offer a range of short-term and long-term placements.

At the time of this inspection, Regional Foster Families had 15 fostering households providing foster care to 16 children and young people in both short-term and long-term placements.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since May 2017.

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: 17 to 21 May 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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	requires improvement to be good
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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

Supervising social workers take time to get to know the children and offer regular guidance and support to foster carers. There is an established out-of-hours service, which means that carers feel supported and can talk to someone if they need advice. Positive relationships between foster carers and the agency help children to receive good support.

Some children are placed permanently with their foster carers. Commissioners said that placements are well matched. When children arrive at their foster homes, they are given welcome boxes containing essential toiletries, written information about the agency and a handmade blanket and toys. A support worker has recently joined the agency and provides day care to some children. This additional support contributes towards placement stability. Stable placements help children to develop a sense of permanence.

Education is valued by staff and foster carers. Children without a school place are supported into appropriate provisions. Carers take an interest in children's learning. During the COVID-19 restrictions, foster carers worked hard to support children with their remote learning when they could not go to school. There are opportunities for children to develop their talents by attending activities outside of school. Some children enjoy football and cricket. Effective liaison between school and the agency means that children are helped to reach their full potential.

Fostering households attend activity days. These events provide opportunities for children to socialise with each other. Virtual events during the pandemic helped children and foster carers to feel connected to the agency.

The children's guide is translated into a second, relevant, language and an adapted version is available for children who have additional needs. This ensures that children from all backgrounds have the information that they need about living in foster care.

The care provided is sensitive and responsive to children's identity and family history. Children's cultural needs are met. Adaptations are made for children who require a special diet. Religious needs are respected and children are supported to attend their chosen place of worship. This ensures that children are cared for with dignity and respect for their individual beliefs.

Foster carers benefit from resources within the wider organisation. For example, support groups for men who foster and those caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are held nationally. This helps to link foster carers with others across the organisation so that they can learn together and share experiences.

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

Incidents of children going missing from their foster homes and other risk-taking behaviour are low. Children do not routinely engage in substance misuse. Foster carers take effective steps to protect children from risks in the community, including radicalisation. Foster carers know whom to contact if a child goes missing. This helps to keep children safe from risks in their local community.

When concerns about a child's well-being are identified, the agency communicates with the child's social worker. Meetings are held with professionals to discuss concerns. This means that all professionals involved in a child's care are involved in decision-making to help keep children protected from harm.

Unannounced visits have continued during the pandemic. Some visits to foster carers have been undertaken in foster carers' gardens and some children were seen outside. Some household checks have been undertaken remotely. Virtual tours of the fostering home help to provide reassurance that the environment remains suitable until such time as face-to-face visits are undertaken.

Checks are made on prospective foster carers. Applicants are invited to attend pre-approval training at an early stage. Feedback from this training is used to inform decisions about how the fostering task may impact on the adults and any children living in the household.

The agency has an established panel with diverse membership, including a care experienced adult. The panel has met virtually during the pandemic. The panel adviser is also the registered manager. The panel provides external scrutiny on decisions taken by the agency. However, on one occasion the panel was not made aware of concerns raised by a child about their foster carer.

In respect of the above concern raised by a child, the agency informed the child's local authority social worker. However, the agency did not investigate the concerns and the concerns were not included in the foster carers' annual review report.

Risk assessments and safer caring plans give foster carers information about children's vulnerabilities. These plans are individualised and most guide foster carers in what they need to do to care for the children safely. However, in some cases, risk assessments are not consistently updated following significant events. Some do not provide sufficient information to carers about the action that they need to take to minimise risks following a serious incident.

Some foster carers do not have up-to-date training in managing the risks faced by children online. A foster carer who was not trained in internet safety found it difficult to manage a child's phone use as set out in the child's plans.

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

Weaknesses in management oversight have led to inconsistencies in practice and a lack of clarity around expectations in some areas. These gaps in knowledge have not been identified or addressed by the manager.

Arrangements for a child who self-administers their prescribed medication are not being monitored effectively. In this case, the agency's own medication policy is not being followed. Guidance for foster carers on their responsibility to monitor this arrangement is not written into the child's plans. The manager was not sure what checks, if any, the foster carers were completing to ensure that the child was taking their medication as prescribed. Poor monitoring of medication arrangements does not provide assurance that a child was taking their medication in accordance with the prescribed dose.

The agency promotes de-escalation techniques to manage behaviour and children are not regularly restrained. Although, on two occasions, professionals' meetings were held, children were not seen and spoken to within 24 hours following restraint incidents. In one case, a child's plan was not updated following a restraint incident with guidance about how to respond safely to a similar incident in the future. The agency's own policy says that children will be seen within 24 hours of a restraint. The manager had not picked up these gaps in practice. Supervising social workers and managers were not familiar with the agency's own expectations in seeing children following restraints. Failure to visit children and foster carers after incidents of restraint does not provide assurance that the child's welfare is being protected.

A foster carer who had been approved by another registered office owned by the same organisation transferred into the agency. An up-to-date assessment was not presented to the panel at this agency as part of the transfer process. A child was placed with this foster carer and the carer was not able to meet the child's needs. The child was subsequently moved.

Staff said that they feel well supported by the manager. All supervising social workers have low caseloads which allow them time to respond to emerging issues and give them time to dedicate to supporting foster carers and children in placement. Supervising social workers and the manager receive regular supervision. However, supervision records do not reflect that there is sufficient challenge to staff or foster carers to ensure consistency of practice and professional curiosity.

The manager is committed to making ongoing improvements. During the inspection, the manager began work on an action plan to address the identified shortfalls.

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>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must–</p> <p>make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable. (Regulation 28 (3)(a))</p> <p>In particular, if concerns are raised about foster carers, include the concerns in the annual review report and present them to panel.</p>	5 July 2021
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that monitoring systems include effective oversight of medication and restraint.</p>	5 July 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe when using the internet or social media. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards' 4.4)
- The registered person should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about its carers' ongoing suitability to foster. ('Fostering Standards: National Minimum Standards' 13.8)
- The registered person should regularly monitor all records kept by the agency to ensure compliance with the agency's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering Standards: National Minimum Standards' 25.2)

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: SC442774

Registered provider: Regional Foster Families Limited

Registered provider address: Old Auster, The Causeway, Mark, Highbridge,
Somerset TA9 4QF

Responsible individual: Joann Catterall

Registered manager: Sara Rayner

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Inspector

Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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