

UK Fostering North East

UK Fostering (NE) Limited

Room L1, Business & Innovation Centre, Wearfield, Sunderland, Durham SR5 2TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered on 26 May 2020. It is a subsidiary company of UK Fostering Limited.

The agency offers emergency, short-term and long-term placements and a small number of specialist placements, including remand and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency provided support and supervision to 10 approved foster care households and looked after 13 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in 2020 and is suitably qualified for the role.

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: 5 to 9 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, considering **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: n/a

Overall judgement at last inspection: n/a

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children do exceptionally well in their placements. They are well prepared before they move into a foster family. The agency works extremely well with social workers to ensure that foster carers and children receive detailed information that supports the matching process. Children are provided with excellent, child-friendly profiles of the foster carer's family prior to moving into the home. Children also receive a 'goodie bag' full of useful items, chosen and designed by children with support from the agency. As a result, introductions are meticulously planned, enabling children to feel valued and respected from the very beginning.

Many children thrive in their placements due to the high level of bespoke support that they receive, and the consistency of supervision provided to the foster carer/carers. This has been a particular strength during the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency completes its supervision and support to carers and children through a variety of different methods, and through the creative use of technology in completing video calls to communicate with carers, the children and the household. This supports a consistent oversight of the quality of care provided to children.

Children spend a considerable amount of time with their carers and the fostering family. This is especially true during the periods under lockdown and throughout the loosening of COVID-19 restrictions. This has enabled relationships to flourish between children and their carers, based on trust and respect. This is replicated in discussions with professionals, with one stating, 'Communication with carers and the agency was fabulous right from the beginning.'

Children are supported to make excellent progress in their health and their education. Many children have been subject to periods of home schooling during the pandemic. Inspectors saw some examples of highly organised and skilled tuition of children via their carers working collaboratively with schools. A social worker said, 'The fantastic home schooling has ensured that [name] has made outstanding progress.'

Children from the North East Branch are represented in the provider's national children in care council. The provider's wealth of resources includes a social media video from a former child in care. He explains all aspects of the children's guide and a range of questions focused on children being safe and happy. This supports children's rights and promotes their voice. Children are provided with a link to this video and the provider is working through its plans to develop this work further.

When carers make the initial enquiry, they are supported exceptionally well from the very beginning of the process. Foster carers speak highly of the assessment process and the information that they are provided with once they have expressed an interest in becoming a foster carer. Assessments are thorough and well written. A particular strength is the high standard of report writing and consistently high level

of recording throughout the agency. A professional stated, 'Reports are concise, clear and up to date. You can tell that the supervising social worker has done her work and you can see the progress in the child.'

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

Children feel protected from harm and many develop extremely positive relationships with their foster carers and the wider foster family. This promotes stability in children's lives.

Children's needs, risks and vulnerabilities are clearly identified and thoroughly understood. Risk assessments are regularly updated and reviewed by the agency and the foster carers. This promotes the early identification of risk. The strategies that are identified are purposeful in supporting risk reduction for children.

The agency uses appropriate language in risk assessments which is less stigmatising and explains children's behaviour specifically. This is forward thinking, as the manager recognises these records belong to children and that, one day, the children may wish to access them. The well-being and safe care of children is at the centre of excellent practice.

Foster carers access an extensive variety of training resources from the provider's online library. Often, resources include learning tools that can be used and shared with children to support their understanding of risk and danger, for example the process of grooming, child sexual exploitation and self-harm. One such tool included a quiz and social stories linked to the possible dangers and misuse of social media. These resources during lockdown supported children and their carers to learn together, promoting the safe use of technology. This means that children become increasingly safe.

The agency and carers work extremely closely with partnership agencies, such as local authorities and the police, in managing and working with risk. The agency's professional relationships are highly effective in reducing incidents of children going missing from care and other associated risks. This enables children to develop confidence and trust in their carers and promotes their resilience.

Boundaries and expectations for children are detailed in the very good, child-specific safe care policy. The policies are individualised and updated in accordance with the child's age and development during the time they are with their carers. The policies are shared with children at the beginning of their placement and reflect the home and the family's boundaries, expectations and basic house rules for everyone. This supports children in developing a sense of belonging and respect.

The agency ensures that the staff follow safeguarding procedures. The agency responds appropriately and ensures that, when required, a full investigation takes place. This includes reviewing and assessing carers through the monitoring and procedural route of the fostering panel.

The panel is chaired by an appropriately experienced independent professional. The panel members have a wealth of experience and represent the diversity of society. The analysis, evaluation and quality assurance processes are of a high standard. The panel minutes reflect this. The agency decision-making process is clear and well presented.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is highly motivated and is an excellent role model. She is highly valued by her colleagues and her foster carers. The manager and the supervising social worker are responsible for the day-to-day practice. This enables the manager to have a hands-on approach to the supervision and quality of care provided to children. The ethos is totally focused on the positive relationships that the manager has with the children and their carers. This close working relationship that provides quality supervision and support helps many children make exceptional progress.

The manager and the responsible individual invest a lot of time and energy into providing a learning environment. This enables carers, staff and management to access online resources covering a range of topics. The regional managers, directors and staff meet via regular virtual meetings to discuss and evaluate relevant practice, serious cases and issues of interest. The manager often uses the information gained to provide workshops for carers on children's needs linked directly to the national minimum standards. This supports knowledge development and good practice to improve outcomes for children.

Foster carers take part in the recruitment process for new carers. A wonderful, creative and funny social media production was created by carers to attract new carers. Children take an active role in the recruitment of new staff for the agency. This enables children and their carers to feel valued and respected.

The manager is proactive in the design of new systems of recording and in the excellent monitoring processes used by the agency. These enable the manager to quickly track the progress of children and to complete case audits in a timely manner. This thread of high-quality recording and attention to detail is exceptional.

The agency's statement of purpose and children's guide are both available on the agency's website. They are comprehensive, colourful, very professional and available in several languages. The website is accessible for adults and children. This is an area of strength and is maintained to a high standard.

Foster carers, children and external professionals were overwhelmingly positive about the service. The manager and the supervising social worker are highly visible to carers and the children. This visibility and support provides outstanding services to children and their foster carers.

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: 2587198

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Inspector

Michael Dack, Social Care Inspector

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