

Outset Fostering Agency Ltd

Outset Fostering Agency Ltd

Vision 25, Electric Avenue, Enfield EN3 7GD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency provides a range of foster placements, including parent and child placements, short-term and long-term placements and placements for disabled children. The agency currently has nine fostering households that provide care for five children. The first child was placed with the agency on 10 May 2021.

The agency and the manager were registered with Ofsted in November 2020.

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: 19 to 23 July 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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children settle quickly into well-matched and well-planned placements. All children have made progress from their individual starting points and remain engaged in education. Children's achievements include reducing the frequency of self-harmful behaviour and beginning to feel less angry.

Despite the agency only being operational for nearly three months, initial outcomes for children are positive and there have been no placement breakdowns. All the children are placed with carers who live near the children's family homes. This proximity helps children remain in their original school placements, enjoy time with their families and continue with a range of interests, including dance and playing football.

Educational progress for children is positive. Foster carers prioritise the importance of children's consistent attendance and engagement in education. Where English is not children's first language, foster carers offer basic English lessons, which children enjoy. Help with learning English supports children's adjustment to a new country. At present, the agency does not track children's progress effectively, therefore limiting a full evaluation of progress.

Foster carers' own children support placements effectively. They attend training with their parents and develop an understanding of children's needs. This helps to support a family atmosphere within placements.

Foster carers strive to build relationships with parents where possible. For example, a parent was recently invited to attend their child's sports day by a foster carer, much to the enjoyment of the child concerned. Additionally, where appropriate, foster carers give parents pictures of their children enjoying activities and keep photo albums of the children. This is extremely important to both children and parents and helps alleviate children's anxiety.

Children's behaviour is good, due to the clear and consistent expectations of behaviour. Foster carers understand and implement behaviour plans. Effective strategies are identified to manage children's behaviour, such as encouraging children to play in the garden when feeling unsettled and earning a star sticker for good behaviour.

The agency does not have effective systems, such as a children's participation group, to find out children's wishes and feelings. In addition, information relating to children's views, wishes and feelings is lacking from risk assessments, which compromises their effectiveness.

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

Children form trusting relationships with their foster carers. Children said, 'I like living here,' and, 'I feel safe'. A social worker commented, 'The placement has gone swimmingly. The carer has really gone the extra mile.'

Risk assessments are of good quality and understood by foster carers. The principles of safe care are clear and evident, such as controlling access to the internet and discussing the positives and negatives of social media use with children. Incidents of children going missing from home are very rare. This demonstrates that foster carers understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children.

Foster carers report feeling well prepared for their role. Introductory training includes discussions with care experienced adults, who outline the challenges that may arise when children run away from home or harm themselves. One foster carer said, 'I really knew what I was getting into and I am really enjoying my job.'

Foster carers are recruited from a range of cultures and ethnicities. Foster carers have enjoyed a wide range of relevant experience before they take on the role, including working with vulnerable children. These experiences help foster carers to understand the needs of children in their care.

Children receive a well-planned welcome into their foster homes. For example, before an emergency placement for one child, the foster carer bought the child's favourite food and some mementos of his favourite football team. This helped to create a warm introduction for the child into the home.

The agency prioritises the importance of effective care planning to support children. For example, the agency is currently considering the possibility of one child who has recently arrived in the country remaining with his foster carer beyond his 18th birthday. Collaborative working with other agencies and professionals is effective and supported by foster carers, who feel valued and empowered by the professional network. Children's social workers report regular communication with foster carers and share key information such as, where child sexual exploitation is a concern, the names of friends and associates. This supports a good safeguarding culture.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is a qualified social worker and a highly experienced foster carer. This experience remains integral to the positive start made by the agency since opening. He has completed all the foster carers' assessments for the fostering panel and supervises all of the foster carers. This helps the registered manager to have strong oversight of the agency and he uses this knowledge to inform good placement decisions.

The agency has grown slowly and within manageable timescales. All of those connected with the agency are excited by the realistic and achievable development

plan. The registered manager plans to recruit additional staff as the number of approved carers continues to rise.

The registered manager relishes the possibility of 'making a difference for children'. When required, the agency provides additional resources to support placements. For example, an activity worker currently supports one child's placement by offering weekly activities.

Foster carers are well supported by the agency and receive good-quality regular supervision. Supervision is focused on children's experiences and their progress. One foster carer commented about her supervising social worker, 'He is there when I need him, morning, noon or night. I could not ask for more.' Strong support helps carers develop confidence in their practice and a sense of trust with the agency.

Foster carers report that they benefit from an impactful training programme. Training allows carers to develop an increased understanding of the children in their care. A foster carer reported that a recent training course on child sexual exploitation helped them to put some of the behaviours exhibited by a child in her care into context. Foster carers' training and attainment is reviewed and monitored through an electronic system.

The registered manager is creative and effective in supporting children and foster carers. On one occasion when he identified that a child may struggle to adapt to a new placement, an introductory dinner was arranged with the foster carer. The child was subsequently placed with the foster carer and settled well into the placement.

The fostering panel is effective. Panel members are recruited from a broad skill base and this contributes to the well-informed scrutiny and recommendations made by the panel. The fostering agency acts quickly on recommendations from the panel, such as a suggestion for additional training for a foster carer.

The agency does not formally record the verbal verification of references. This limits a full evaluation of potential employees and compromises safer recruitment 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 fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular the fostering service provider must—</p> <p>implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16 (1) (2)(a))</p>	1 October 2021

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. In particular, the agency should provide a forum where children can express their views about the care they are receiving. Children's views should be recorded in their risk assessments. Furthermore, children's wishes, feelings and views should be taken into account by leaders and managers to support the development of the agency. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.3)
- The registered person should ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references and the verification details for employees and ensure that the details are recorded on recruitment files. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 19.1)

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: 2581761

Registered provider: Outset Fostering Agency Ltd

Registered provider address: Vision 25, Electric Avenue, Enfield EN3 7GD

Responsible individual: Peniel Sium

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Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, Social Care Inspector

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