

# Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering

Sandwell Children's Trust

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, P O Box 2374, Oldbury B69 3DE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering was registered on 7 March 2018. The agency was formerly part of the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council Children's Services and then became part of Sandwell Children's Trust in April 2018.

The agency offers mainstream, short- and long-term, emergency and 'connected persons' placements. At the time of this inspection, there were 146 children living in 103 approved connected carer households and 138 children living in 102 approved mainstream carer households.

A permanent registered manager was appointed to Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering on 3 August 2020 and was registered by Ofsted on the 7 May 2021.

The permanent head of service was appointed to Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering on 2 September 2019 and was confirmed by Ofsted as responsible individual for the fostering service on 27 March 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: 2 to 6 August 2021

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<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:** 25 November 2019

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

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

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

Children are well matched to their foster carers. Matching identifies any potential shortfalls in carers' experience and how these will be addressed so that the carers can meet the needs of the child. As a result, placement stability is good, with unplanned endings remaining consistently low.

Placement stability has continued to improve during the COVID-19 pandemic. Managers routinely hold meetings to review the stability of placements. The family support team provides a range of early placement interventions to foster carers and children who require additional support. When placements have ended, managers have looked at what lessons could be learnt to develop the service's and foster carers' practice.

Children settle into their new foster homes due to the dedication and understanding of the foster carers. Foster carers build positive relationships with the children. Children are integral members of their families. As a result, children develop a strong sense of belonging.

Foster carers are strong advocates and have high aspirations for the children they care for. They support children to develop appropriate independence skills. This increases children's confidence and self-esteem and successfully prepares them for their next steps into adulthood.

Foster carers work in partnership with other professionals, such as teachers, social workers and therapists. Children are supported to have access to medical professionals to meet their short- and long-term health and well-being needs.

Foster carers are beginning to experience more-consistent support from supervising social workers. They are receiving regular visits and telephone calls. During the Covid-19 restrictions, many of these visits were conducted virtually. Since restrictions have begun to ease, these have gone back to being face to face. The progress and the well-being of children are now integral parts of supervision with foster carers. Supervising social workers see the children as part of this visit and are able to evidence the children's progress.

Managers are giving good focus to care planning and permanency for the children. For example, significant work is underway to support foster carers who are interested in applying for a permanency order. Alongside this work, managers are creating capacity in the connected carer support team to increase formal support to special guardians.

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

The safety and the well-being of the children is given good priority by managers, staff and foster carers. Foster carers have the information they need to care for the children safely. Safeguarding policies and procedures, safer care policies and risk assessments are implemented and are regularly reviewed and updated. These ensure that risks are identified.

Safeguarding is embedded in the foster carers' and staff's programme of training. The training programme includes a range of safeguarding and safer care training, including exploitation, online safety and signs of safety. This helps to ensure that foster carers and staff have the skills and the knowledge to keep the children safe from harm. The training is complimented by discussions in staff supervision sessions and in regular support groups.

Managers respond to child protection concerns carefully and promptly. The responsible individual and the registered manager liaise closely with all relevant professionals and share information appropriately. When there is a shortfall in practice by a foster carer, it is quickly and thoroughly investigated. These appropriate actions ensure the safety of the child is given priority.

Incidents, such as children going missing from the home, are low. When actions are required, foster carers and staff act swiftly. Work is successfully completed with appropriate safeguarding professionals to develop strategies that reduce the level of risk to the child.

The registered manager tracks all concerns, incidents and referrals alongside the quality assurance service manager and the local authority safeguarding officer. The registered manager ensures that even if a case does not meet the threshold for a child protection referral, it will still go to a post allegation review. This ensures that there is good independent review of incidents as well as transparency and scrutiny of managers', staff's and foster carers' practice.

Two children have experienced significant delay in receiving the aids and the adaptations they require in their homes to ensure that their foster carers can safely meet their needs. In one case, this has delayed an operation that a child needs as, without the aids, the foster carers are unable to meet his post-operative care needs. Foster carers have advocated strongly on behalf of the children in their care. However, the fostering agency has not worked with partnership agencies to ensure that the needs of the children have been met in a timely way.

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

Managers are implementing significant changes to the agency to drive up standards and ensure that they have a good operational overview of the impact of outcomes for the children, the foster carers and the staff. Developments have resulted in quick improvements in some areas. For example, the improved timeliness of foster carer annual reviews, foster carer approvals and staff supervisions.

In other areas, new developments have taken place, but achieving the desired outcomes will take longer. For example, new systems have not yet ensured that all foster carers complete mandatory training or training, support and development (TSD) standards for foster care within the timescale. A clear framework of training and development is now in place. This is being used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. Managers have a good oversight of those foster carers who have achieved TSD and mandatory training within the timescales, and there are clear expectations and strategies in place to support those who are struggling.

Quality assurance systems are enabling managers to take proactive actions quickly where standards fall. For example, some staff sickness has been covered in the agency. However, when managers realised the impact this was having on the timeliness of supervisions for foster carers, they appointed a temporary agency worker. This has quickly ensured that the frequency of supervisions is addressed.

The work to embed these changes is ongoing and is not yet having a positive impact for all children, staff and foster carers. Inspectors heard from some staff, foster carers and children who had a good awareness of the new direction of travel. Inspectors also heard from a minority of staff and foster carers who are not yet experiencing positive change and do not identify the independent fostering agency as being separate from the rest of the practice they experience elsewhere in the Trust.

Staff are supported by confident managers. They are receiving regular supervisions and team meetings, which promote reflective practice. All teams are fully recruited to with permanent members of staff.

A new foster carer recruitment strategy is in place, and managers are on target to meet this year's recruitment numbers. However, there is development needed to ensure that there are sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and to predicted future demands on the service.

Assessments of foster carers are analytical and link strengths and vulnerabilities to Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The preparation and the training of prospective foster carers enable them to have an insightful understanding of the complexities surrounding the fostering task.

Panel members are professionally curious and are making recommendations based on the strengths and vulnerabilities of foster carers. The agency decision-maker makes well informed and clearly evidenced final decisions. As the panel membership has strengthened and grown in confidence, the quality of assessments has improved and panel recommendations and the agency decision-maker's decisions have dovetailed. However, there remains good evidence of professional challenge and independence.

The panel members and the staff have missed an opportunity to share and to consolidate new practice because managers have not arranged an annual joint training day for the panel members on the central list and the fostering staff team. Opportunity to improve practice is missed because views about the panel chair's performance are not being sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel.

## **What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers receive the training and the development they need to carry out their role effectively. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, page 40, paragraph 20)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there, including, where appropriate, any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, page 22, paragraph 10.1)
- The registered person should ensure that each person on the panel central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, page 48, paragraph 23.10)
- The registered person should ensure that the independent fostering agency implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, page 28, paragraph 13.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation, such that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare that meets individual needs of each fostered child and of foster carers. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, page 35, paragraph 17.5)
- The registered person should ensure that views about the panel chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, page 41, paragraph 5.15)

### **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:** 1267324

**Registered provider:** Sandwell Children's Trust

**Registered provider address:** Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, PO Box 2374, Oldbury B69 3DE

**Responsible individual:** Shanti Eaves

**Registered manager:** Andrew Logie

**Telephone number:** 0121 569 4760

## **Inspectors**

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Inspector  
Anne Daly, Social Care Inspector  
Debbie Holder, Social Care Inspector



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Manchester  
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