

Brighter Futures For Children: Fostering Service

Brighter Futures For Children Limited

Reading Borough Council, Bridge Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2LU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 31 January 2019.

Inspection dates: 18 to 24 January 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 10 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

Children have a sense of permanence and stability. They are well matched to foster carers who have the relevant experience and skills to care for them. Their lives are enhanced by the care and nurture that fostering families give. This is because supervising social workers and foster carers advocate on their behalf and ensure that children's needs are put first.

Children are supported to build and sustain relationships with the important people in their lives. Committed foster carers go above and beyond what is expected of them to ensure that children see their family and friends. Because of this, children have learned how to develop secure and trusting relationships.

Foster carers have access to a wide range of support. This includes additional training, access to specialist clinical advice and support groups. During the inspection, inspectors saw how a child's complex needs were now being met in a family environment. Another example included a foster carer learning a new communication method to better understand the child's views and feelings. As a result, children's lives have been enhanced and their voices heard.

The agency staff and foster carers have positive relationships with professionals. This is achieved by regular attendance at meetings, information sharing and joint planning. This approach has contributed to the significant progress for some children. For example, one child is now attending school after a period of nearly two years' absence.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities and outings. Despite many community-based activities being curbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, children continued to access these. For example, foster carers took them on picnics to meet up with family and friends safely and encouraged them to keep fit outside. These opportunities helped to keep the children active, increase their confidence and learn new skills. This was also appreciated by the children and their extended families.

Children's culture and identity are promoted. Committed and proactive foster carers support children of all faiths to attend religious celebrations and regular gatherings. Birth families' views are respected and considered when making plans. As a result of this, children's religious and cultural needs are met.

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

Safeguarding children is embedded into practice. Children are supported to take age-appropriate and properly assessed risk. For example, children can have access to mobile phones. This enables them to keep in contact with their foster carers while out, including travelling independently to and from school.

Children rarely go missing. Well-trained foster carers ensure that appropriate actions are taken on the odd occasions that children do go missing. This includes trying to maintain contact with the child while they are out and reporting incidents to the relevant professionals. Agency staff also work closely with foster carers and the wider network to ensure that the correct procedures are followed, plans reviewed, and risk assessments updated. This practice helps to keep the children safe.

The recent recruitment of a trauma-informed practitioner has enhanced the support, advice and guidance the agency offers to foster carers. Reflective group sessions, facilitated by the agency, has provided an opportunity for everyone involved to work together. This supports foster carers to care for children with behaviours that others may find challenging. As a result, children have remained living with their foster families.

Unannounced home visits to foster carers' homes promote the children's safety and well-being. Any concerns are followed up in a timely manner and thoroughly considered by managers. This ensures that children are living in a safe environment.

In situations where safeguarding concerns have been identified, leaders and managers take appropriate action. This includes liaising with other agencies and carrying out standards of care investigations where necessary. The outcomes and actions from these show that this practice is thorough. A recent example of this includes an annual review for a foster carer being brought forward. This identified further training and support required to meet the needs of children in their care.

Managers keep clear records of safeguarding incidents including all contacts and follow-up actions taken. This means that information is readily available for effective oversight of emerging risks and identification of any patterns that may arise over a period of time.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The appointment of the responsible individual has strengthened the management arrangements. There is a clear vision for the service which is ambitious and forward thinking. Positive outcomes for children and support for foster carers has already improved. The registered manager and responsible individual have identified some gaps in practice and there are plans in place to address these.

Over the past year, there has been a high turnover of staff. Leaders and managers have acknowledged the impact this has had on morale and are working hard to address this and recruit new staff. The introduction of regular team days aims to bring everyone together, address the uncertainty and manage the positive changes that are taking place.

Leaders and managers have high expectations of staff. The process for managing their performance is effective. Supervising social workers benefit from regular supervision and appraisal. In situations where practice falls short of what is expected, managers follow the relevant policies and procedures. The records they

keep are detailed and clear and show that staff are given the opportunity to change, reflect and improve their practice before any formal action is taken.

Complaints are managed well and recorded effectively. Open and transparent discussions with the staff team and foster carers support the learning and development culture within the agency. Compliments from other professionals reflect some of the good practice seen during the inspection. These highlight the commitment of foster carers and productive multiagency working to maintaining children's security and well-being.

The functioning of the panel is a strength within this service. Panel members are suitably vetted and qualified. They share a wealth of experience and knowledge. Decision-making is strong, and the panel chair effectively holds the agency to account while making recommendations in the best interests of children.

The governance arrangements are strong and provide an additional layer of scrutiny for the service. The registered manager has a range of quality assurance systems in place to monitor and track the progress of children. Senior leaders have oversight of these and collectively review information which is shared in regular management meetings.

Senior managers are committed to the agency and share the ambitious vision. They are visible to the whole staff team and have a good insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the service. There is strong evidence of ongoing informed practice and development oversight to continually seek improved outcomes for the children.

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: 2502331

Registered provider: Brighter Futures For Children Limited

Registered provider address: Reading Borough Council Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2LU

Responsible individual: James Jennings

Registered manager: Stefanie Roth

Telephone number: 0118 937 4377

Inspectors

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector (Lead)
Amanda Harvey, Social Care Inspector

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