

TACT Fostering - London and the South East

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Innovation House, Coniston Court, PO Box 137, Blyth NE24 9FJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering service is a part of The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT). The trust is a national charity which provides a number of registered fostering services across England, Scotland and Wales. This fostering service operates in South London and the South of England. The agency moved to an entirely home-based service in March 2021.

The fostering service provides short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child foster homes. It also provides foster homes to disabled children, and foster families who allow siblings to remain together.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 86 approved fostering households and 82 children placed with its foster carers. The independent fostering agency registered in March 2003. The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2019.

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.

Inspection dates: 31 January to 4 February 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	outstanding

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

Date of last inspection: 24 October 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The fostering service provides a good quality of care, and the experiences and outcomes for children are very positive. Children, many of whom have complex needs, receive personalised care that meets their needs, and they are kept safe.

Children benefit from successful and stable foster placements. Their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. As a result, children thrive in secure placements, enjoying relationships that are loving and nurturing. A child said of their foster carers, 'I like the fact that I can open up to them about any problems and not feel at all worried or scared to do so as they are extremely supportive.'

Children develop a good sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. The agency pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity. For example, children attend places of worship if they wish, and foster carers support children to safely explore gender identity issues.

Children confirmed that they feel listened to. They are aware of how to make complaints, but do not do so. Children are able to influence the development of the agency through effective consultation. The agency's children's support worker ensures that children have a voice within the fostering service. This helps to shape the services provided to children.

Children benefit from the fostering service's careful placement planning and matching processes. These systems are effective in identifying suitable foster carers to care for children. Where placements are planned, introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are sensitively arranged. This helps children to settle quickly with their new families.

Children's learning outcomes and general development are good. They make good academic and vocational progress. School and college attendance is high, and children make steady progress from their starting points.

The fostering service has a dedicated education team that monitors children's learning objectives and outcomes. The team provides advice and support and will intervene with education professionals to help improve children's learning outcomes. However, in one case reviewed, the timing of the team's intervention had not been prompt, and so the child did not fully benefit from its input. Children celebrate academic and more general achievements. This acts as further motivation for children to do well.

Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that there is good promotion of their physical, emotional and social well-being. Children have excellent access to primary healthcare services and receive advice and support from specialist services when this is required. This is particularly the case for children who have complex health needs.

Children benefit from the input of the agency's therapeutic service. Therapists provide foster carers and staff with consultation to help resolve difficult placement issues. In some cases, the therapists work directly with children. This is to support their healthy emotional well-being and to provide children with an opportunity to explore complex issues in a safe, therapeutic environment. However, in some cases, the timing of the team's intervention has not been prompt, and so children have not fully benefited from its input.

The agency prepares older children well for adulthood. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the agency's children's services team. A number of young adults remain living with their foster carers in 'staying put' arrangements. This allows them to remain living with their foster families and maintain existing relationships for continued support and guidance.

A local authority social worker said, 'The carers have gone above and beyond to provide good care to the children. We are currently assessing one of my children to be long-term matched with carers as she wishes to remain in their care and is settled and happy.'

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

Foster carers and staff of the fostering agency work hard to protect children from harm and abuse. They ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount.

The fostering service continues to work with staff and foster carers to explore a trauma-informed approach to care. This supports foster carers to understand and manage children's risk-taking or challenging behaviour.

Children benefit from the fostering service's comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Children have good opportunities to speak with staff in private, and the agency's consultation with children is regular. Staff routinely complete unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. This further promotes the safety of children.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection. This supports their safe care of children. There are very few instances of children going missing from home, substance misuse, involvement in child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation.

Risk assessments and children's individual safe care plans outline how fostering households will keep children safe. These are regularly updated to indicate children's changing circumstances and child protection needs. This helps to inform foster carers about action to take when risks are posed. These strategies are effective and include, for example, how to prevent the risk of online abuse, self-harm and children going missing from home.

Investigations into allegations are prompt and appropriate. Managers ensure that their communication with safeguarding specialists, such as local authority designated officers and the police, is regular and effective.

Managers and the fostering service's human resources team ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and panel members.

Foster carers and staff receive training and written guidance that helps them to keep children safe. However, there is a need for some foster carers to better understand their obligations to inform staff promptly when incidents occur, and then be advised as to what action to take. Staff also need to ensure that personal care practices are consistently appropriate. This was found not to be the case in one instance.

Foster carers and staff regularly attend multi-agency professionals' meetings convened to address children's risk-taking behaviour. Managers monitor and have good overview and insight into safeguarding incidents. These are generally managed well. A local authority social worker said, 'The children are kept safe, and there are up-to-date risk assessments and safety plans. I have a good working relationship with the carers, and we all work well together.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership of the fostering service is excellent. Leaders and managers are ambitious and strive for continual improvement in children's achievements. The registered manager is qualified and very experienced. She receives support from a range of senior managers within the organisation, who are committed and equally invested in achieving ambitious progress and positive experiences for children.

Leaders and managers are highly visible within the organisation and have a keen interest in obtaining the views of all stakeholders. This is in an effort to further improve the outcomes for children. A foster carer told the inspector, 'We were at a TACT event, and I asked the bloke next to me to grab a burger. I didn't realise it was the director. That's how it is here. We're all equally important'.

The fostering service has highly effective monitoring systems. Leaders and managers continually review an action plan for the continual growth and development of the fostering service. For example, the registered manager prepares quarterly management reviews of the service. The very regular overview of the service prompts change and innovation. This results in improved outcomes for children. However, managers' file audits do not always outline foster carers' correct approval status.

Leaders consistently make use of research and study materials to inform their decision-making. For example, the agency aims to enhance its existing trauma-informed approach to care. This is to help staff to improve their skill base and knowledge about the impact of children's past trauma and the implications for children's foster care. Managers explore children's protection, placement issues and

any emerging themes regularly within formal management forums. This helps to ensure that children have safe, positive experiences.

The agency provides foster carers and staff with exceptional training. The training programme is extensive and of a high quality. It equips foster carers with excellent knowledge and skills. This helps them to care for children safely. However, not all foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards within the 12-month time frame as required.

The service is well resourced to meet the needs of foster carers and children. Foster carers overwhelmingly say that the support they receive from the fostering service is excellent. Staff maintain good communication with foster carers and very regularly visit them and children at their homes. A foster carer said, 'The supervising social workers are very experienced, knowledgeable and supportive. Managers are all very accessible and supportive to carers. The carers are supportive of each other, and the communication between the agency and those working for them is very good.'

The staff team is equally well trained and supported. A member of staff said, 'I'm really happy here. Managers care about me, so I can care about children and young people.' Staff receive regular and meaningful supervision, and training opportunities are good. They participate in reflective team and peer support group meetings, have access to well-being sessions, and therapists provide clinical consultation to help to inform their practice.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and benefits by having a membership that is drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is effective, and panel meeting minutes are sufficiently detailed.

Staff complete foster carer assessments comprehensively. The annual reviewing process is thorough. This promotes the regular review of foster carers' suitability to continue to care for children.

Managers' and staff's communication with other professionals is effective. A local authority social worker said: 'The agency is focused on and ensures that they are improving and promoting positive outcomes for children. Particularly by ensuring that the caregivers are well supported and trained. The agency is forward thinking, therapeutic, trauma informed, relational and professional.'

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. (Regulation 16 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the education team must intervene promptly to resolve issues with children’s educational attainment as they arise.</p>	1 May 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>In particular, the agency’s therapeutic team must intervene promptly to support placements where challenges are emerging.</p>	1 May 2022
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p>	1 April 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 20.3)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. In particular, foster carers’ approval status should be consistently documented in line with foster care agreements. (‘Fostering services: national minimum standards’, 26.2)

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: SC034000

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Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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