

Barnardo's – North East

Barnardo's

1 Lumley Court, Drum Industrial Estate, Chester-le-Street, County Durham DH2 1AN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

Barnardo's is a well-established children's charity, which is also registered as a voluntary adoption agency. It operates five offices nationally in England, one of which provides adoption support only. The other four offices recruit, prepare, assess and approve prospective adopters, and offer a variety of support services to children and families, both prior to and after the making of an adoption order.

This inspection has been conducted in line with the 'Social care common inspection framework (SCCIF): voluntary adoption agencies'. This notes that Providers of voluntary adoption agencies receive one judgement for all registered offices.

All five offices are managed by suitably qualified and experienced managers.

Inspection dates: 23 to 27 May 2022

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account **good**

How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 7 March 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: This is the agency's first inspection under new inspection guidance for voluntary adoption agencies, which came into force in 2018.

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Adoptive families report with pride about the progress that their children are making since being placed with them. Children benefit and make progress from being placed with nurturing families where they feel loved and nurtured. They gain a sense of belonging that builds their confidence and self-esteem. Outcomes for children are positive. They make progress with their education; their health needs are met and they enjoy a wide range of activities. Staff advocate effectively for children, for example by attending educational meetings and enabling children to obtain specialist health services.

A strength of the agency is the wraparound support available to children, their families, birth parents and adult adoptees, from the first point of contact to post-adoption. Individuals and families report the ease of gaining support and that the quality of the support has prevented adoption disruptions. The agency operates a 24-hour helpline that is available all year and provides effective and prompt help and support to adoptive families.

Extensive support is offered to people affected by adoption through the agency's Making Connections service and the Connecting Adoptive Families Independent Service (CAFIS). This work is undertaken with skill and sensitivity. It makes a significant difference to people's lives by helping them to understand the impact of adoption on their lives and family.

The views and wishes of children are listened to and taken seriously. Children record questions to ask prospective adopters at the panel. The agency has formed a 'Young Inspectors' group, which invites children to give their views about the quality of the service being provided by the agency. Children's guides to adoption are produced in different formats according to the age of the child. They offer comprehensive information about adoption that is sensitively delivered, so that children understand their adoption journey.

Assessments of prospective adopters are timely, thorough and analytical and are generally of a good quality. They offer the panel and decision-makers the information they need to decide whether to approve prospective adopters. Adopters report that they were warmly welcomed to the agency and that they felt comprehensively prepared and trained to become adoptive parents.

Placement disruptions over the past 12 months are slightly higher than the national average. When there is a family disruption, the agency undertakes an extensive evaluation and any learning for the agency is implemented. In two cases, issues that may have an impact on children placed had not been sufficiently explored. There was a lack of extensive and rigorous management oversight during the assessment and at the panel.

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

Potential adopters are prepared and supported to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect through good-quality training and assessment. The agency has a comprehensive behaviour management policy and procedure. Children report that they feel safe and secure living with their adoptive families.

Adopters are supported and trained to manage children's behaviour effectively by using a therapeutic parenting approach and de-escalation. Adopters are expected to use physical restraint as a very last resort. On one occasion, an adopter restrained a child. This incident was not reviewed in accordance with the agency's policy, to ensure that there was thorough investigation of the incident and the learning put in to practice.

Children's safety is promoted through rigorous health and safety checks of prospective adopters' homes. This helps to ensure that children only live in safe and suitable homes. Comprehensive recruitment checks are undertaken for prospective adopters to ensure that they are safe and suitable people to adopt a child. Any concerns that these checks raise are thoroughly checked prior to approval.

Agency safeguarding procedures help to protect and promote the safety of children. The agency has effective working relationships with safeguarding professionals. One safeguarding incident was reported to safeguarding professionals in line with agency safeguarding procedures. However, this incident was not followed up and the outcome was not documented. Therefore, an audit trail of this was not maintained. This shortfall did not have an impact on the safety of the child.

Comprehensive staff recruitment procedures are in place that help to ensure that only suitable people are employed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency promotes partnership working, both at strategic and operational levels, and is actively creating positive working relationships nationally with the Regional Adoption Agencies. Leaders and managers demonstrate an ambitious vision and are child-focused. Adoption expertise in this agency is being used to inform national adoption policy and is shaping the future of adoption services. For example, the agency is informing and shaping national adoption projects, such as early permanence and an improved adopter assessment tool.

Leaders and managers show an ambitious vision and are child-focused. They ensure very high standards of comprehensive adoption support for adoptive families, which is a strength of the agency. The agency retains the experienced staff that they employ. The staff report that they are very well supported by their managers, so that they, in turn, can support adoptive families effectively.

Staff are highly committed and motivated and demonstrate a passion to provide a high-quality adoption service. They benefit from receiving comprehensive and regular support and challenge through good-quality supervision and appraisal. Because the staff are so well supported by the managers, they, in turn, can support adoptive families effectively.

The staff undertake an extensive training programme to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to deliver effective and specialist support to adoptive families. For example, the staff have undertaken specialist behaviour management and therapeutic parenting training, Lego® therapy training and training in life-story work.

The agency recognises the value and skills of those individuals who have lived experience of adoption. They value and encourage their contribution to adopter and staff training programmes.

The agency operates four adoption panels, one in each office. Panel members are appropriately trained and knowledgeable to make recommendations about the suitability of prospective adopters. Agency decision-makers ask comprehensive questions of the panel and provide appropriate challenge if needed, which informs decision-making.

The panel undertakes a generally effective quality monitoring function. However, the chair's six-monthly reports do not comment on the quality of assessment reports and identify any trends or patterns to inform quality assurance processes. Panel members grade the quality of the agency social workers' assessment reports at each panel. Prospective adopters praised the panels and how the panel chair made them feel at ease, while still asking the necessary probing questions to evidence their suitability to adopt.

This is a learning agency that welcomes feedback and listens to adopters, children, service users and professionals. Quality assurance systems are in place. However, there is not yet an embedded national process in place to ensure that the learning from complaints and feedback is always used to make continued improvements.

Although most records are of a good quality, a minority of records in one office were found to contain incorrect information and had been cut and pasted, indicating a lack of management oversight.

What does the voluntary adoption agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account by the adoption agency in monitoring and developing its service. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 1.6)
- The registered person should ensure that all records are regularly monitored by the agency to ensure compliance with the agency's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. This particularly refers to ensuring that records do not contain incorrect information, and that panel minutes contain the vulnerabilities of prospective adopters and how these will be addressed and that records are signed by managers to evidence management oversight. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the adoption panel provides a quality assurance feedback report to the agency every six months on the quality of reports being presented to the panel. This includes whether the requirements of the Restrictions on the Preparation of Adoption Reports Regulations 2005 have been met, and whether there is a thorough, rigorous, consistent and fair approach across the service in the assessment of whether a child should be placed for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the proposed placement. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 17.2)
- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept, which includes details of the action taken, and the outcome of any action or investigation, following a notifiable event or safeguarding investigation. (Adoption: national minimum standards 2014, 29.2)

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 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: SC051835

Registered provider: Barnardo's

Registered provider address: Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford IG6 1QG

Responsible individual: Brenda Farrell

Telephone number: 0191 492 9000

Email address: brenda.farrell@barnardos.org.uk

Inspectors

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector
Jacqueline Tate, Social Care Inspector
Katie Ratcliffe, Social Care Inspector
Joanna Heller, Social Care Inspector
Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector
Linda Bond, Social Care Inspector

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