

# Barnardo's Fostering Service

Barnardo's

Unit 6, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Leeds LS12 6AJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's is a limited company and a registered charity. Barnardo's Fostering Service is a national independent fostering agency, providing fostering and short-break services across Yorkshire, Humber and North Lincolnshire. It currently has 29 children and young people in foster homes and 35 foster carers.

The fostering agency registered in 2006. The manager has been registered with Ofsted since May 2019.

### Inspection dates: 6 to 10 June 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>requires improvement to be good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 25 June 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Children make progress in loving, long-term foster families and most experience high levels of placement stability. However, not all children's progress can be confirmed because the agency is using unreliable data to monitor the children's progress and outcomes.

Children are cared for by experienced and committed foster carers who treat them as members of their own family. The foster carers that were consulted during the inspection understand each child's unique characters, vulnerabilities and needs. The agency utilises 'staying put' arrangements and these are used effectively, which offers older young people stability and a safety net as they adapt to the adult world.

All children attend an education provision, and they benefit from regular attendance. Children who need extra tuition are supported by their foster carers to catch up with subjects outside of school hours. This is helping the children to achieve and fulfil their potential. Some older young people are attending college and university, which enhances their prospects.

Foster carers play a significant role in promoting the children's education, and they work with education providers effectively. However, not all foster carers have the relevant education plans available to them. This does not provide assurances that they are fully appraised of and are meeting the children's educational needs.

Children have access to local health services. However, there is a lack of clarity about how some children's health needs are understood and met. This is because not all foster carers have been provided with the appropriate health records by the agency. One child's medication records have not been made available to the agency by the foster carer. This concern has not been addressed by the agency with sufficient urgency. This does not enable the agency to monitor the medication to ensure that it is safely and effectively administered to the child.

The engagement of some children in therapy promotes their emotional well-being, but there is no analysis of the difference that the interventions have made. The foster families' engagement in a project that promotes healthier lifestyles through different funded physical activities has been beneficial to several families.

Participation is a strong aspect of the agency, which is facilitated effectively by the agency's fostering support and participation worker. It involves the whole family in a range of enjoyable activities in addition to the children's existing pastimes. Foster families are consulted by the agency. Their suggestions are considered and acted on as appropriate, which makes foster families feel listened to. The informative newsletters from the agency keep foster families informed and connected to the agency.

Foster carers promote and facilitate children's time with their birth families, allowing them to maintain the familial ties to their cultural heritage.

The agency has experienced some challenges when recruiting new foster carers. A plan is in place to increase the sufficiency of foster carers to ensure that suitable matches between foster carers and children continue. The agency has been commended by a newly approved foster carer for the positive way in which they were recruited and assessed.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

There are flaws in some of the agency's safeguarding practices which do not promote a strong and reliable safeguarding culture.

Agency social workers do not consistently apply their understanding of safeguarding practice. Not all agency social workers have shared concerns about foster carers quickly with the agency. For example, an agency social worker did not communicate their concerns about a foster carer's management of a child's behaviour directly with the foster carer and the agency. This has delayed the agency's ability to respond to the concerns and satisfy themselves that the child is safe.

Children rarely go missing from their foster homes. On occasions when children have gone missing, foster carers follow the appropriate protocols to ensure that children return home safe. The risk assessment for one child who went missing in April this year has not been updated to include the recent missing incident, which gives a false impression about this specific risk.

Foster carers confirm that a qualified therapist gives them high-quality advice and support during consultations. This helps foster carers to take care of their own emotional needs and those of the children that they foster. Not all foster carers receive behaviour management and physical restraint training to support children should their behaviour become dysregulated. As a result, children's behavioural outbursts may not be managed safely and effectively. The arrangements are not consistent with the leaders and managers view that the agency has a hands-off policy unless there is a need or it becomes apparent that a child needs to be physically restrained.

The agency has not taken action to challenge and support foster carers who have failed to record incidents of physical restraint or have not documented them clearly. For example, there are gaps in relation to the duration of some of the physical interventions, and the information about whether a child had sustained any injuries is contradictory. Not all physical interventions have been recognised by the agency. No evidence of reflection or learning following a physical restraint has been evident during some supervisory visits. As a result of inconsistent management oversight, it cannot be determined if the holds are safe, necessary and proportionate. These gaps may expose foster carers to allegations and children to harm.

Allegations against foster carers are handled well by the agency. Timely referrals and notifications have been made by the agency to the local authority designated officer and Ofsted. The prompt action by the agency ensures that unsuitable individuals are prevented from caring for children. Robust safer recruitment practices ensure that suitable agency social workers are appointed to supervise foster carers and have contact with children.

Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes provide additional safeguards for children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

Leaders and managers have monitoring systems in place to oversee the performance of the agency. However, they lack robust oversight to identify all of the gaps, address poor practice quickly and drive forward the improvements in a timely way. The quality-of-care monitoring report does not include how the consultations that the agency has with children, foster carers and placing authorities inform service improvements.

The shortfalls have prevented leaders and managers from effectively scrutinising every aspect of the agency and making timely improvements. For example, the data that managers hold and use on the spreadsheet is not reliable. The reason for this is partly as a result of the inaccurate information contained in the tracker that leaders and managers use to measure the children's outcomes. This leaves the service vulnerable to reporting inaccurate progress or decline for children without solid evidence. This may result in gaps in planning for children and the agency asking the local authority for information.

Leaders and managers cannot demonstrate how they have escalated and challenged local authorities on their own and with the support from external contractors when children's care planning documents have not been forthcoming. This may leave foster carers without the full information that they need to care for children. It also raises questions about how leaders and managers ensure that the service is operating effectively, that all children are safe, that their needs are met and that their outcomes are good.

Agency social workers report that they receive regular supervision. Their supervision records vary in quality. While one set of supervision records were of a high standard, there were discrepancies in others. One newer recruit has missed out on a supervision session early in their role. Their mid-way review record lacks clear details about their progress, and the name of another person has been recorded instead of their own name.

The agency's response to addressing concerns regarding foster carers' conduct and the requirement that they comply with the foster care agreement are inconsistent. In one example, leaders and managers have taken a robust approach to address concerns regarding one foster carer, yet they have allowed concerns regarding

another foster carer to drift significantly without any strong evidence of challenge. There has been a lack of urgency and decisive action to manage the situation. As a result, the agency has not received any records from the foster carer for a significant period, so it is unclear how the child is progressing. Leaders and managers have acted in response to the concerns raised during the inspection. A clear action plan explaining how leaders and managers intend to address the concerns has been submitted to Ofsted.

The agency's fostering panel runs in accordance with the regulations. It benefits from an experienced and qualified chair. The fostering panel's central list has a good level of independence and expertise from different backgrounds. The reasons for making recommendations are justified in the panel minutes.

The agency decision-maker is well placed in the role, and she makes decisions without fear or favour. Panel minutes are well written and capture the discussions that take place. However, the panel minutes that related to one foster carer assessment recorded information in a way that could imply that the foster carer's approval was guaranteed. This was not noted and corrected, which could undermine the integrity of the process. Annual reviews of foster carers have improved in timeliness since the last inspection, and they are overseen by an experienced and consistent independent reviewing officer.

Foster carers speak in positive terms about the frequency and quality of the training, which covers topical issues. However, the training that foster carers receive is not reflected in some of the documents, and the management oversight of the training is not evident. This does not ensure that leaders and managers are assured that the foster carers have the appropriate skills to meet the children's needs.

The agency has achieved stability after a period of turbulence and turnover of staff and foster carers. Agency social workers and students are offered learning and development opportunities which help to keep them up to date with practice issues. They report job satisfaction, manageable caseloads and speak highly of the management and peer support. Foster carers consulted acknowledge the changes that have taken place in recent years, and they commend the support that they receive from the agency.

Children's social workers consulted with during the inspection reported good communication with the agency. They are satisfied with the quality of care provided to the children.

The agency has met the requirements that were raised at the last inspection. These relate to the agency sending the statement of purpose and children's guide to Ofsted within 28 days of revision, notifying Ofsted about significant events in a timely manner and having sufficient staff employed at the agency. The good practice recommendations have also been addressed.

Leaders and managers have taken the findings from this inspection seriously. They have devised action plans to address the shortfalls that have been identified. They are very reflective and show the capacity to improve.

## 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 registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to—</p> <p>the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and</p> <p>the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency,</p> <p>carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that leaders and managers use reliable monitoring and review and reporting systems to scrutinise all aspects of practices in the agency and satisfy themselves that all children cared for by the fostering agency are safe. Ensure that an accurate outcome tracker is maintained to monitor the progress of all children. Ensure that all staff understand their role and responsibilities to report any concerns to the agency in a timely manner. Ensure that concerns about foster carers are robustly challenged and addressed in a timely manner and any non-compliance from foster carers is dealt with without undue delay.</p>	29 July 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that—</p>	29 July 2022

<p>no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable, and</p> <p>restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property. (Regulation 13 (1) (2)(b)(c))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all foster carers receive behaviour management training and foster carers who may need to use physical restraint receive training to ensure they do this safely. Ensure that any incidents of physical restraint are clearly recorded and children are provided with the appropriate medical checks and debriefs to ensure they are safe. Ensure that foster carers are offered relevant debriefs following significant behaviour management incidents, including those that have led to physical restraint. Ensure that the registered manager has a system in place for management monitoring, oversight and review of the use of all physical restraints.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 15 (1))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all foster carers keep a written record of all medication administered to children and make it available to the agency as required.</p>	29 July 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.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6 (3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (1) (3))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that foster carers' training records are up to date and reflect the actual training that foster carers have received and provide an audit trail of management</p>	29 July 2022

oversight. Ensure that leaders and managers have effective systems to escalate concerns to local authorities to obtain the relevant care planning documents so that the children's needs are met in line with their plans.	
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them—</p> <p>receive appropriate training, supervision, and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that all staff employed by the agency are supervised at appropriate intervals, that the supervision records are written to a consistently good quality and that the discussions relate to the correct staff member.</p>	29 July 2022
<p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (Regulation 35 (1) (3))</p> <p>In particular, demonstrate how the feedback from children, foster carers and placing authorities influences service improvements.</p>	29 July 2022

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the panel chair quality assures the written minutes to avoid any misinterpretation. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)
- The registered person should ensure that they take action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them. Specifically, ensure that all children's risk assessments are kept up to date. Ensure that the impact of therapeutic interventions on children is evaluated in partnership with the local authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.8)

## 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:** SC068456

**Registered provider:** Barnardo's

**Registered provider address:** Barnardo's, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford IG6 1QG

**Responsible individual:** Alison Rowland

**Registered manager:** Sarah Walsh

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## **Inspectors**

Jacqueline Malcolm, Social Care Inspector  
Deb Duffy, Social Care Inspector

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