

# Foster Care Associates Eastern

Foster Care Associates Limited

Beacon Innovation Centre, Beacon Park, Gorleston-on-Sea, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk  
NR31 7RA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates (FCA) is a national organisation operating since 1994.

FCA Eastern has a regional office in Norfolk. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 107 foster carers in 59 households. The agency provides care and support for 85 children unable to live with their birth family. This agency provides emergency, short-term, permanent and some parent and child homes.

The registered manager left in May 2022.

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: 22 to 26 August 2022

<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:** 11 March 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## **Inspection judgements**

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

Most children thrive and make continual progress from their starting points. Children generally attend education with good and improving rates of attendance. The agency and foster carers ensure that children have additional resources to help them sustain or make progress at school. This ensures children are encouraged to reach their academic potential.

Many children have lived with their foster families for two years or more and have become part of the family. When the children arrive, they receive a memory box, to capture memories of their childhood experiences. Foster carers' records are often written sensitively to the child. These pinpoint children's individual progress. Many children develop long-term meaningful relationships with their foster families and keep in touch when they leave. Some children can remain with carers after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This provides children with stability and a permanent network of support.

Some children are placed with their brothers and sisters. If this is not possible, the agency sensitively supports foster families to provide children's time with their families and significant people. This helps to ensure children retain birth family connections.

Many foster families love their foster children and are proud of their individual achievements. The foster carers show understanding, compassion and a desire for their children to flourish. Children's cultural backgrounds are considered to some extent in matching. Some children live with families whose culture and heritage differ from theirs. Foster carers are not consistent in meeting children's cultural needs, and further work is required to support carers to reflect each child's heritage and culture.

Children enjoy holidays, they receive recognition for their successes and celebrate special occasions. They enjoy a broad range of exciting and healthy activities ranging from football to paddleboarding. A specialised team meets with every child and holds group events throughout the year. These events help to build children's confidence and life skills. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online gaming provided a creative way to connect with harder to reach children. The organised activities bring many of the children and their foster families together. This helps the agency to capture children's aspirations, views and wishes and involve the children in planning for their futures.

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

The children say that they have good relationships with their foster families and feel safe and well-cared for. Children confidently share their worries or concerns with their foster carers, the fostering services manager or supervising social workers.

Strong relationships with children help foster families and supervising social workers to assess and anticipate risk factors. This reduces the frequency of serious incidents.

Most children do not go missing from foster homes. The agency ensures that foster families provide appropriate responses to help children at risk of harm. The agency encourages foster families to support children to learn from and reflect on challenging situations. Foster-carer buddying provides a valued source of help for foster families. The agency offers access to a broad range of online training. An experienced therapist provides attachment training which gives an additional layer of support and insight. This helps foster families to understand the principles of therapeutic parenting.

Supervising social workers see children alone during unannounced visits. This offers opportunities for the supervising social workers to gain a better insight into children's lived experiences. Foster families and supervising social workers are clear about safeguarding procedures and processes.

The foster panel chair and vice chair bring a wealth of professional experience. The panel is well organised and offers thorough levels of scrutiny and challenge. Recommendations to the agency decision-makers are clear and well-constructed. Newly approved families receive the panel's verbal and written outcome in good time. However, the agency's decision-maker role is a shared role. As a result, the written decision for the continuation of approvals is significantly delayed. This does not demonstrate timely decision-making following routine annual foster carer reviews.

The recruitment of staff, the initial screening and assessment of foster carers and their family's suitability is thorough. Despite this, the renewal of police checks for adult birth children is not progressed in good time on every occasion. This does not demonstrate that the agency consistently implements its own policy.

Managers deal with complaints efficiently. The agency intervenes in the event of practice concerns arising. Safeguarding concerns are appropriately shared in good time with external agencies. Referrals to the local authority designated officer are made in a timely manner and internal investigations appropriately progressed. This ensures children's best interests remain central to everyday practice.

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

The responsible individual meets with the team and has appointed a new manager who is due to start in September 2022. The interim management arrangements are vigorous with a strong emphasis on improvement.

Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the staffing and management structure. Some supervising social workers have changed. The recommendations from the last inspection are met. Quality assurance has improved, and managers identify gaps in practice. For example, detailed case file audits show that, generally,

managers are aware of shortfalls in practice, including the quality of some recording. However, some children have experienced unplanned endings and, in some cases, the required actions are not followed through in good time or before the next annual review. This does not ensure that monitoring consistently influences practice when necessary.

Regular newsletters help to keep all families up to date with changes and provide additional information. Foster carer representatives meet with the managers and leaders to contribute to service developments. Foster carers often take part in staff recruitment processes. The numbers of new foster carer approvals have reduced. However, there are extensive efforts from the wider organisation to increase foster carer recruitment and provide comprehensive information about fostering during the application stages.

Due to some staff shortages and during the COVID-19 pandemic, some families experienced more than one change in their supervising social worker. Despite this, foster carers' confidence in the staff team is high. A core group of workers provide stability and, at times, have taken on additional work. Good induction ensures that new staff are well supported. The appointment of more supervising social workers reduces the caseloads for established members of the team and offers reassurance for the foster families and their children. Many foster families commented on the quality of the organisation and the skill of the core team. Foster carers said that the team is available day or night, to offer good support and sound professional guidance.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity. In particular, this refers to children living with families where there are differences in ethnicity difference in ethnicity, culture, or language ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 2.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the foster carer is informed orally of the decision-maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days. In particular, to ensure that the delay in producing the written agency decision is significantly reduced following routine annual reviews of approval. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.10)
- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. In particular, to consistently implement the agency policy for the timely renewal of DBS certificates for all adult children living in foster homes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. In particular, ensure that improvements identified from unplanned endings and quality assurance audits are consistently put into action before the next annual review. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

### **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:** SC061317

**Registered provider:** Foster Care Associates Limited

**Registered provider address:** Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road,  
Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

**Responsible individual:** John Platt

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspectors**

Rosie Davie, Social Care Inspector (Lead)

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

Margaret Burke, Her Majesty's Inspector

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