

Mulberry Foster Care Ltd

Mulberry Foster Care Limited

Orchard House, Phocle Green Business Park, Ross-On-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 7XU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private company operates this fostering agency. The agency was registered with Ofsted in August 2016. The manager registered with Ofsted in October 2016.

The fostering agency service provides emergency, respite, short-term, long-term and parent and child foster placements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 18 approved fostering households and 20 children placed with its foster carers.

Inspection dates: 26 to 30 September 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 13 August 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make excellent progress from their starting points. This is because of the nurturing care that they receive from their foster carers. Foster carers parent the children from a trauma-informed practice that is relationship-focused. As a result, the children experience care that helps them to build their resilience and to achieve future success.

Children are happy and enjoy living with their fostering families. One child told the inspector that he loved living with his carers and was going to live there forever. Another child told the inspector that living with his carers was one of the best places he has ever lived. These positive relationships help children feel safe and secure.

Children benefit from good matching processes that help them to settle quickly into their foster homes and develop positive relationships. Foster carers said that they receive useful information prior to children coming into their care, and that they are never put under pressure to accept placements. This contributes to well-informed decisions being made about carers' abilities to meet the needs of children. Memory boxes created by the agency help support children to feel welcomed into their foster carer's home.

The agency seeks to keep families together. Several children live with their siblings in stable placements. In line with the children's care plans, the foster carers support them to have safe contact with people who are important to them. This enables the children to maintain strong family links.

Children's health needs are consistently met. Carers ensure that children have access to local health services and manage the children's health plans effectively. Children with complex health needs are provided with exceptional support and are making remarkable progress.

Children make good progress in education. Foster carers advocate for children to ensure that they receive the right education in line with their needs. For some children, this means the return to mainstream education. One social worker told the inspector that their child is now in a classroom environment and that this is a significant achievement for this child.

Staff celebrate children's personal achievements. The agency has created a monthly miniature hero award where children, including birth children, receive a certificate and chocolates for their achievements. For example, children have received awards for learning to ride their bicycle and for excelling at gymnastics. These awards help to support and develop children's sense of pride and accomplishment.

Children enjoy individual leisure interests such as spending time with friends, playing football and attending groups. The agency hosts a wide range of events for the

foster care households, such as Christmas and summer parties. These events are well attended and enjoyed by all. These experiences provide the children with enjoyable opportunities to gain a sense of achievement and develop their self-esteem and confidence.

Children's participation is a key strength in the agency. Children benefit from having their views, wishes and feelings considered. The agency continually reviews how the children can meaningfully engage, and regularly consults with the children to improve how it can respond to their needs. Some of the children are part of a children's panel and are involved in the recruitment process for new foster carers. As a result of this, children feel that they are listened to and that their wishes, views and feelings are heard.

Foster carers spoke highly of the support they receive. One carer described the support she receives as 'phenomenal', with another carer describing the agency as being like family. The agency provides the foster carers with opportunities to attend support groups. These meetings are well attended and provide the foster carers with the chance to receive regular updates, as well as offer peer support to each other. Foster carers value the support they receive.

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

Foster carers and staff have an excellent understanding of their roles and responsibilities in keeping children safe. Children reported feeling safe living with their carers. They have formed trusting relationships with their carers and feel that they can talk to them when needed. One child told the inspector that they felt very safe and secure living with their carers and they could talk to them if they had any worries.

Safer care plans and risk assessments are thorough and detailed. They are individualised and provide clear guidance to foster carers around supporting and managing risk-taking behaviours. The agency's response to significant incidents involving children is robust and effective. This helps to ensure that children are kept safe.

Supervising social workers carry out one unannounced visit to each fostering household every year. During these visits, children are spoken to alone and their bedrooms seen. This provides further opportunities to meet the children and ensure that they are happy and safe.

The agency provides excellent resources to carers and a high level of support to manage children's behaviours. This includes commissioning psychologists to work with carers in their homes. For one child, this has helped to rebuild a placement breakdown and stopped a move into residential care. The use of equine therapy and an outdoor adventure service has supported children to regulate their emotions safely while managing the trauma they have experienced.

Research-based practice forms the foundations from which staff and carers work with children each day. For example, staff and carers have undertaken training that supports carers to manage and process the emotions of the children in their care and provides them with a consistent approach to parenting. In addition, the agency has employed a play therapist to support children's social and emotional needs. This will further help children to understand their behaviours and make improvements.

Some children are known to self-harm. In each case, the agency has acted appropriately and effectively to help to keep children safe. Close working relationships with local authority social workers and specialist health professionals have ensured that children receive the right support.

Children do not go missing; however, carers have attended the relevant training and have the necessary skills to manage a missing-from-care incident should it occur.

Social workers complete comprehensive assessments that provide detailed analysis around a potential foster carer's strengths and vulnerabilities. Research-informed practice supports social workers to make clear conclusions and recommendations. For example, social workers will use a wide range of social work theories, such as child development and attachment theory, to explore the applicant's understanding of the lived experiences of the children they will care for. The thoroughness of the assessments ensures that only suitable carers care for children.

Recruitment of carers, staff and panel members is robust. There is effective management oversight of recruitment, which helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and responsible individual are directors of the organisation. They are both passionate about, and committed to, improving the lives of children. The ethos of the therapeutic model of care runs through the core of the agency, which supports carers in providing outstanding care and support to children.

The registered manager has worked hard to create the right environment for staff to work effectively. Staff told the inspector that they enjoy working for the agency and feel that the registered manager and responsible individual are very supportive. The stability of the team is a real strength of the agency, and its child-focused approach ensures that children receive the right outcomes.

Supervising social workers have small caseloads so that they can offer foster carers a high level of support. Carers and children spoke highly of the agency, with one child informing the inspector that their supervising social worker was 'the best' and another child describing the agency as 'great'.

The fostering panel provides a high level of independent scrutiny of the decision-making by the agency. This includes detailed quality assurance of assessments. The panel chairperson provides clear reasons for the recommendations made. Equally,

the agency decision-maker provides thorough and reasoned decisions in a timely manner. This level of scrutiny ensures that carers with the skills to care for children and keep them safe are recruited.

Since the previous inspection, an independent reviewing officer has been employed. This provides another level of scrutiny of the approval of foster carers. Foster carers' annual reviews are in-depth and comprehensive. Reviews are completed within the required timescales and provide extensive information about the carer and the children's experiences.

Supervising social workers and the foster carers are provided with a wide range of training opportunities. The registered manager has sourced high-quality training resources to ensure that carers and staff are equipped to provide the right support for children.

All carers complete an accredited training and development course within their first year of fostering, which enables them to develop and improve their knowledge and practice.

The agency's partnership working with the professional network benefits children. Children's social workers gave very positive feedback about the communication with the agency, the professionalism of staff and the skills of foster carers. When any concerns have been raised, the manager has taken appropriate action to ensure that any issues are addressed.

The manager completes a quarterly monitoring report. The report provides an overview of the service and identifies areas of strength and areas for development. There is strong evidence of ongoing development and improvements over a sustained period to improve the outcomes for children. Plans to develop the organisation are ambitious and support the agency's continual development.

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: 1236131

Registered provider: Mulberry Foster Care Ltd

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Teddington, Middlesex TW11 8DH

Responsible individual: Andrew Robinson

Registered manager: Shaun Burnett

Telephone number: 01432 371 971

Inspector

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

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