

# NFA South East

The National Fostering Agency Limited

Basepoint Business And Innovation Centre, Metcalf Way, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 7XX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The National Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency that operates nationally. This inspection relates to the work carried out by the South East region. The agency provides a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, short-term, long-term, bridging and parent and child placements. Included in its range of fostering services are also the placement of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum and children with special needs. At the time of this inspection, the agency provided for 94 children in 61 fostering households.

The manager is currently in the process of registering with Ofsted.

## Inspection dates: 5 to 9 December 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 **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 2 July 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Children continue to make good progress. The relationships between children and their foster carers are built on trust and understanding. Children are happy and settled. Many are in long-term placements, with some wanting to remain with their carers once they reach independence and beyond. The agency is committed to securing stability for children. The degree of commitment by some staff is well respected and recognised by foster carers. The ethos of the agency is that children come first.

Staff and managers know the children and foster carers very well. Foster carers told inspectors that they feel supported and have a good working relationship with their supervising social workers. The agency rarely misses a meeting in relation to the children's care planning and progress, either educationally or with professionals supporting children's mental health needs.

Supervising social workers and foster carers are committed and proactive in communicating well the relevant professionals. They advocate for children to receive an education. Older children have achieved well beyond their expectations. For example, one child had not attended school for two years and successfully passed all their exams and is now attending college.

The agency promotes diversity in all its work. Supervising social workers and managers are creative in supporting children and carers from a wide range of different cultures and work with foster families from a wide range of different faiths. Language barriers are addressed by using interpreters, to ensure that all children are heard and understood.

Many children have surpassed their expectations. Children's wonderful achievements are celebrated each year at an awards ceremony. Children said that they enjoy this ceremony and recognition. However, there is a lack of recognition in everyday practice for those children who make significant progress from their starting points.

The children's voice is generally heard and acted on. However, not all children contribute to their care planning. Nonetheless, children are encouraged by their foster carers and staff to attend their own meetings. This ensures, where possible, that the children's views are listened to.

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

Overall, children feel safe and believe that their foster carers care about them. Effective communication and positive relationships between agency staff and other professionals reduce the risks to children who go missing, or who are at possible risk of child exploitation. However, on one occasion, a foster carer had not reported a child missing. Subsequent effective action and recording by the manager show that communication with professionals remains effective.

Overall, risk assessments are clear, concise and targeted to the actions required. Children are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks. Processes formulated in response to fostering legislation are referred to in the risk assessments. These support foster carers to have a more thorough understanding of their role and responsibilities and further improve their ability to safeguard children.

When required, investigations of foster carers are thorough, well recorded and carried out within timescales. Managers encourage supervising social workers and foster carers to be curious and embrace challenge. Nonetheless, there is some lack of reflection encouraged by the supervising social workers and foster carers. However, this has not prevented foster carers from improving their practice and further safeguarding children.

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

There is currently no registered manager. The manager is in the process of registering with Ofsted. The manager has been part of the organisation for some years and knows the service well. The staff team is cohesive and well established. This offers continuity to foster carers, who describe supervising social workers as committed and supportive.

Despite some recent changes to the wider organisation, managers and senior leaders remain clear in their vision for providing stability and development opportunities for staff and foster carers. Regular management meetings provide opportunities for the leadership team to collectively review information. However, the monitoring systems and quality assurance processes are not yet fully embedded.

All staff receive regular practice-related supervision. Overall, supervision for staff and foster carers is consistent and valued. All staff and foster carers are appropriately qualified and have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide informed care for children. However, not all training has been successfully completed by staff and foster carers. Training is an area that needs development and further priority by the agency. Although this is already a focus for the agency, the process for monitoring shortfalls in training is not effective in identifying areas for support and action at the earliest opportunity.

The fostering panel is organised and effective, offering good-quality support to new and experienced foster carers. It is chaired by a knowledgeable and independent person. The panel members have the relevant skills and experience, however there is no permanent and consistent education representative or care experienced person. Nonetheless, the panel chair does actively seek input if necessary, and decisions are not delayed as a result.

The agency decision-maker provides clarity and a good rationale on decision-making. Information and reports from supervising social workers and managers are received promptly. This enables decision-making to be timely and informed. Any

recommendations are unquestionably in line with the agency's overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

## 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 take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3).</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(2)(3))</p>	30 June 2023
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (3))</p>	30 June 2023

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure care and support provided to children minimise the risk that they will go missing, and reduce the risk of harm should they go missing. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 5.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

## 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:** SC035553

**Registered provider:** The National Fostering Agency Limited

**Registered provider address:** Atria, Spa Road, Bolton, Greater Manchester BL1 4AG

**Responsible individual:** Neil McCarthy

**Registered manager:** post vacant

**Telephone number:** 01293 307139

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## **Inspectors**

Jill Sephton-Wright, Social Care Inspector  
Amanda Maxwell, Social Care Inspector

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