

Rainbow Fostering Services Limited

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Rainbow Fostering Services, Unit 10, Churchill Court, 58 Station Road, North Harrow, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7SA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Rainbow Fostering Services is an independent fostering agency based in Harrow, Middlesex. It provides placements across London, Kent, Essex, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Oxfordshire and Hampshire. It operates under one registration from the main office in London and has satellite offices in Milton Keynes, Birmingham, Manchester, London and Portsmouth.

The agency undertakes the recruitment, assessment, training and approval of foster carers, and it provides ongoing support to foster carers. It provides permanent and non-permanent care to children, and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had 119 fostering households caring for 168 children and nine young people in 'staying put' arrangements.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 January 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 14 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children have meaningful relationships with foster carers who really care about them and show commitment to their role. The agency and foster carers are incredibly child-focused and place children at the heart of everything they do. Together, they want to make a difference to children's lives and give them the best opportunities possible. The agency has a strong base of committed and diverse carers who have worked with the agency for many years. This continues to provide children with stability, and many children have lived with their foster carers for several years.

Placement stability is an area of strength in this agency. From the point of referral, there is careful and considerate matching of children and carers. If issues arise during the placement, the agency is quick to respond and provide additional support. As a result, there are very few unplanned endings for children.

Children engage in education and make good progress. The agency has some real success stories about children who are exceeding expectations in education. Many children who have left care have gone on to further education. This gives children more opportunities going into adult life.

Children are in good health and their health needs are met well. Foster carers prioritise children's healthcare needs and ensure that all appointments are attended. The agency cares for a number of children with complex needs who require a higher level of healthcare intervention. The agency has some very experienced carers who are passionate about caring for children with complex needs and who mentor other carers. This gives all children, regardless of their ability, the opportunity to live in a fostering family home.

The agency celebrates diversity and is inclusive of all children. The diversity of foster carers and staff in the agency ensures that children's religious and cultural needs are understood well. Many children are able to live with foster carers who share their culture, religion and/or ethnicity. Bi-racial placements are managed well, and foster carers have a good understanding of children's individual cultural needs. This enables children to practise their faith and observe their traditions.

Children engage in a wide range of activities with their foster families. The agency also provides opportunities for children to socialise through the youth participation officer and events such as the children's awards ceremony. Children work one to one with the youth participation officer, which gives them further opportunities to build relationships, share their views, engage in new activities and get support when they need it most.

Children are invited to share their feedback and input into the running of the agency. The agency and foster carers know children very well. This ensures that children are

given a voice. However, it is less clear how the agency obtains the views of children who do not speak English.

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

The risks to children are understood well, and there is a proactive approach to managing risk. Supervising social workers regularly update children's risk assessments and have clear plans to help reduce the risks. Regular safeguarding meetings ensure that there is ongoing management review and oversight of safeguarding concerns. Leaders and managers appropriately report concerns to local authority designated officers and placing social workers as required.

Allegations against foster carers are managed well, and thorough investigations are completed. Following allegations, foster carers are returned to panel to ensure that there is independent review and oversight. This supports good decision-making for children and ensures the ongoing suitability of foster carers.

Children do not regularly go missing from their homes. The agency has a very low number of children that have been missing. Often, these incidences are for a few hours and only on rare occasions have them been overnight. In situations when children are missing, appropriate action is taken. Additionally, no children are involved in sexually or criminally exploitative relationships.

Children receive help to manage difficult emotions and behaviours. Foster carers are given the tools to support children through additional training and access to a therapist when required. Foster carers are well supported by experienced supervising social workers who help to build their confidence and skills. This helps foster carers to build resilience and be more able to fulfil the fostering task. As a result, children are more settled, and their behaviours continue to improve.

Safe recruitment practice is strong. Careful recruitment of foster carers and staff ensures that only suitable people work with children. Recruitment checks are thorough and in line with regulations.

Children are supported to learn how to keep themselves safe. The youth participation officer runs regular workshops for children about specific topics, such as online safety. This helps children to understand risks and ways to keep themselves safe.

The agency was managed effectively throughout the COVID pandemic. Leaders and managers report that the agency adapted well, children continued to be seen virtually during national lockdowns and placement stability was good. Foster carers and staff confirm that the COVID pandemic was managed well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are fully committed and dedicated to improving the lives of children. They are ambitious about what children can achieve and continue to strive for better outcomes for them. Leaders and managers are child-focused and ensure that children receive high-quality care.

Leaders and managers know all of the children and foster carers very well. This is achieved through direct contact with children, their foster carers and staff as well as effective monitoring systems. This ensures that leaders and managers have a good understanding of the progress children are making.

Foster carers feel very well supported by the agency. All carers say that communication is excellent, and they can always speak to somebody when they need to. Many described the agency as a 'family'. Foster carers feel that the agency goes above and beyond to make sure that they get the support that they need to keep children safe and maintain their placements.

Staff morale is positive, and workers feel supported in their roles. Staff receive regular and effective supervision. Staff training and events ensure that staff continue to grow and develop. Regular team meetings give staff the opportunity to come together and discuss their practice. Staff retention is good, and there are few changes for children and foster carers.

Foster carer training is meaningful and effective. Staff and managers identify carers' individual needs and provide extra training when necessary. All foster carers now complete a substantial therapeutic training course. Foster carers report that this course helps them to understand children's needs and behaviours better.

The fostering panel is effective. The panel ensures that there is a rigorous process for approving and reviewing foster carers' suitability. Issues identified during assessment are explored, and helpful recommendations are made to support foster carers. Independent reviewing officers produce good-quality annual reviews of foster carers.

The agency has good relationships with commissioners and local authorities. One commissioning alliance confirmed that the agency is one of their high-priority providers, that they are good at meeting local authority sufficiency needs and that there is very low placement breakdown.

The agency has a considerate and informed marketing strategy. The marketing manager has worked in the agency for several years and has a good understanding of the social care sector. The marketing strategy is based on knowledge and research to inform the agency's recruitment strategy and business plan. This ensures that the agency invests money into the right channels and does not take away from the resources available to children.

The quality of children's and foster carer's records is variable. Inspectors found that some files are missing information, and some records do not reflect the work undertaken by staff. While this has not impacted on the care provided to children, it does not evidence the good work that is undertaken. This is an area for improvement that requires better management oversight.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that appropriate arrangements are made to support children and young people for whom English is not their first language (especially refugees and asylum seekers), carefully taking into account the individual child's circumstances. ('The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 4: fostering services', page 19, paragraph 3.34)
- The registered person should ensure that staff understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files and that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.2)

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: SC031621

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Inspectors

Leanne Grant, Social Care Inspector
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