

Foster Care Link

66B Cazenove Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 6AA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering service provides foster carers for Muslim children in and around London, the Midlands and the North West. The service endeavours to provide fostering families that match children's racial, cultural and religious backgrounds. The agency provides a wide range of placements. These include short-term, long-term, parent and child, sibling placements, children who have disabilities, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 'staying put' for young people.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing foster care placements for 65 children in 44 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 February 2023

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: 19 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The fostering service provides high-quality care that meets children's needs well. Outcomes for children are exceptional and they thrive while living with their foster families. Children have excellent experiences. They develop safe, stable and secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. They feel loved. A child said, 'The best thing about living here is being with my family. They are the right family for me. I have everything I want here.'

The fostering service offers foster placements for Muslim children. The service pays excellent attention to equality and diversity issues. For example, before moving in with their families, children receive written information about the service both in English and in relevant community languages. The children's guide is available in audio for children who do not read. There are plans for this document to be made available in audio form in different languages. Children have access to interpreters and translated information.

The fostering agency encourages children to practise their faith to the degree they want to. Some children who identify as Muslim choose not to practice their faith, and this is respected. Staff and foster families support children who have complex needs, such as a learning disability, to improve their communication skills so that their preferences are understood.

The agency's matching process is exceptional. In most cases, children's identity needs are expertly matched with their foster families. Introductions to children's new families are carefully coordinated and are planned at the child's pace. As a result, children settle quickly and benefit from stable family environments. Many children have lived with their families for several years. Unplanned endings are rare.

Children's learning outcomes and general development are excellent. They make significant academic and vocational progress from their starting points. School and college attendance is high. Staff are proactive in challenging education specialists if they feel that children's educational provision fails to meet their learning needs. Children, their foster carers and staff celebrate children's achievements.

Children lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers and staff ensure that children's physical, emotional and social well-being is strongly promoted. Children have good access to primary healthcare services and they receive advice and support from specialist services as required. This is particularly the case for children who have complex medical needs. Communication between the fostering agency and healthcare professionals is effective. This ensures that children's healthcare needs are very well met.

Children benefit from the fostering agency's commitment to promote their emotional well-being. In one case, staff found out where the grave of a child's deceased parent

was. This information had previously been withheld. The agency arranged for the child to participate in a funeral service lead by an imam. This helped the child to grieve in a supported environment. The efforts of staff and foster carers were significant in offering the child a sense of emotional closure.

Children receive good support to develop practical life skills to increase their independence. A number of young adults remain living with their foster carers in 'staying put' arrangements. This allows them to remain living with their foster families and maintain existing relationships for continued support and guidance.

Feedback from local authority social workers is overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care provided by foster carers. One said, 'I am very impressed with the quality of care provided by the foster carers and the level of support provided by the agency. The foster carers meet all of the children's needs to a very high standard and have welcomed the children into their home, family and extended family. Since being placed here both children have progressed and blossomed with self-confidence and have both shared with me that they want to live here forever and they love their foster carers.'

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

Foster carers and fostering service staff work hard to protect children from harm and abuse. They ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount. Children say that they feel loved and safe with their foster families.

Children benefit from the fostering service's comprehensive child protection policies and procedures. The registered manager studies and conducts research to ensure that policies are updated and are in line with current social care practice and procedures. This ensures that foster carers and staff are aware of appropriate action to take in the event of a safeguarding incident. However, in one instance, staff failed to inform Ofsted of a significant event. This is not in line with the fostering regulations.

Children have very good opportunities to speak with staff and managers. The agency conducts consultation exercises to obtain children's views. Children actively participate in, and some chair, their own looked after children's reviews. They routinely contribute to their foster family annual reviews. Children meet staff in private when staff undertake home visits. The agency's policy and practice are that children must be interviewed at least every 12 weeks. Staff routinely carry out unannounced visits to foster carers' homes. This further promotes the safety of children.

Placement plans address children's changing needs and include strategies that help to reduce risks to children. Staff complete comprehensive safe care plans and risk assessments. These also help to reduce known and anticipated risks. Instances of children going missing from home are rare. When this does occur, foster carers and staff take effective action to encourage children's safe return home.

Instances of substance misuse by children, or involvement in child sexual exploitation or child criminal exploitation are also rare. When these happen, children receive support to help them to reduce risks and protect themselves. Staff offer children training and workshops on specific issues such as safe internet use, to promote their safety. Staff and foster carers have experience of supporting children who have experienced trafficking and of working with girls who are at risk of forced marriage.

The assessment and preparation of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection. This supports the safe care of children. Foster families have general household and child-specific safe care policies in place. These outline how fostering households will keep children safe in their home and elsewhere.

Foster carers set clear and consistent boundaries for children, which are outlined in support plans. These plans provide foster carers with effective strategies to help to manage children's sometimes complex behaviours and to promote appropriate behaviours. Foster carers receive specialist behaviour management training. This supports their, and their children's, use of effective techniques to manage children's behaviour and to help them to regulate their emotions. Foster carers do not restrain children.

A specialist family therapist said, '[Name of child]'s foster carers have made a hugely positive difference in his life. When [name of child] was first placed with them, he was very traumatised, with difficult and challenging behaviours. The risk was quite high and the anxiety that this provoked even higher. The foster carers are able to really listen and understand [name of child]'s and his brother's voice and try hard to understand their needs.'

Investigations into complaints and allegations are robust, prompt and appropriate. Managers ensure that their communication with safeguarding specialists, such as local authority designated officers and the police, is regular and effective. Records of investigations are detailed and include a clear chronology of events and of the action taken. Staff ensure that the well-being of children is central to all investigations and staff appropriately challenge foster carers about their care practices. Foster carers report that they receive support when they are subject to complaints or allegations.

Managers ensure the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and panel members. This confirms that staff are suitable to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership and management of the fostering service are strong and effective. Leaders have an ambitious vision for the service and are aspirational in their efforts to ensure children meet their full potential. The registered manager is committed and is passionate about making improvements to the fostering service which make a difference to children's lives. For example, leaders are currently developing a digital

texting system to encourage children to share their views in a format that they find easy and prefer.

The registered manager is well experienced and qualified to run the fostering service. He is supported by directors who are visible and involved in the development of the fostering service.

Leaders and managers effectively and efficiently monitor the quality of the service at regular intervals. For example, the registered manager conducts formal quality of care reviews very regularly, every three months. These reports detail developments and activities undertaken by the service. An action plan details what needs to happen to address any areas identified for improvement. However, monitoring reports do not consistently include feedback from children and other stakeholders. Case records detail managers' regular file audits. This ensures that children's records are of a high standard.

Managers and leaders are interested in the impact the fostering service has on children's lives. Children's files include updated progress trackers. These highlight in detail children's overall progress and placement outcomes. These help managers to assess the stability of placements, and to take action if outcomes are not as expected.

The fostering service's preparation of foster carers is effective. This ensures that prospective foster carers have good insight into the needs of children, young people and parents, and that they are equipped to meet identified needs.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively. Its membership is drawn from a range of professional backgrounds. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work that is presented at panel meetings. However, some minutes of fostering panel meetings lack detail to help clarify points of discussion. The quality of foster carers' assessments presented at the panel is consistently high.

The training of foster carers is excellent. Foster carers complete core and specialist training. Foster carers have personal development plans which staff regularly review. This ensures that any identified development or training needs are met.

Leaders and managers provide foster carers and staff with excellent support and supervision. A foster carer said, 'There's teamwork. I feel a part of a team. There's always someone there to listen. Every year the agency gets better and better.' Staff pride themselves in providing foster carers with an out-of-hours service that staff run themselves. This means that outside core hours foster carers are able to seek advice and guidance from their supervising social workers. Foster carers are highly appreciative of this level of individualised support.

Staff receive effective and consistent training and supervision, and this helps them to reflect on their practice. Managers complete annual appraisals for all staff. This ensures their development needs are met. Leaders and managers encourage staff's

participation in the development and improvement of the service. Managers and leaders value staff.

The fostering service works very effectively with other professionals. There is close partnership working with children's social workers. This ensures that placements are in children's best interests. One local authority social worker wrote to agency staff to say, 'I wanted to say thank you for all the support you have given me as a social worker whilst I have worked alongside you and our young people. Your knowledge and support have been invaluable and has shown me how good partnership working can really improve the outcomes for our young people.'

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
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))	1 April 2023
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 (3))	1 April 2023

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reason for their recommendations. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.7)

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: SC049096

Registered provider: Foster Care Link

Registered provider address: 66B Cazenove Road, London, Stoke Newington,
London N16 6AA

Responsible individual: Mohammed Zina

Registered manager: Abdurrahman Sayed

Telephone number: 020 8880 5387

Email address: admin@fostercarelink.com

Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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