

# Foster Care Associates Western

Foster Care Associates Limited

Office 19, 130 Aztec West, Park Avenue, Almondsbury, Bristol BS32 4UB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This small independent fostering agency covers the areas of Bristol, Gloucestershire, Swindon, Wiltshire and North Somerset. It has an office in Bristol. At the time of the inspection, the agency was supporting 32 fostering families to care for 30 children. The agency is part of a large national organisation. Before 2020, the service formed part of a larger provision that provided care for children across the south west of England.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 8 December 2022.

This is the first inspection the agency has received since it registered in December 2022.

Most foster parents were approved by the agency decision maker in March 2023 after being previously registered with a sister agency.

### Inspection dates: 4 to 7 September 2023

**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:** not previously inspected

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## Inspection judgements

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

Children make good progress while living with their foster parents. They form trusting and loving relationships with carers and their family. Foster parents talk with warmth and pride when they discuss the children. This helps children to flourish in the family environment.

The agency supports and promotes good educational outcomes for children. This is something that the agency does well. Foster parents encourage and support children to complete homework and participate in extra-curricular activities. The agency celebrates children's academic achievements.

Foster parents offer children a range of activities in the community and at home. Children enjoy clubs, trips to the beach, walks and climbing walls. Children's talents are recognised and nurtured. This helps them to try new things and develop their skills and confidence. However, children's records do not consistently represent their daily lived experiences. Some records represent children's lives, while others provide limited detail. This means that not all children are provided with a clear record of their time with fostering families that helps them to understand their experiences as they grow.

Children's moves into and on from foster homes are predominantly well planned. Staff and foster parents help to prepare children for these moves, and they progress in timescales that help children to adjust and settle. Since the agency registered, there have been three occasions when children have moved from their foster parents in an unplanned way. The agency made efforts to support the children and carers through these difficult periods. They have worked with the children's local authorities to find resolutions. No children left their foster parents in emergency circumstances. Children are given positive letters from the agency after their departure to help them remember the positive aspects of their time with the foster families.

Children's identity needs are generally recognised and well considered by the agency. Foster parents help children to engage in cultural and religious activities and traditions that support their faith and heritage. Foster parents help children to express their views about their identity and explore ways that they can remain connected to the things that make them feel they belong.

Foster parents help children to develop life skills that are appropriate for their age. Child learn how to take the bus independently, get jobs and tidy their bedrooms. This helps them to prepare for adulthood and gain confidence in their abilities.

Foster parents help children to maintain relationships with the people who are important to them when it is safe to do so. They develop respectful relationships with birth families and support family time.

The team provides good opportunities for children and foster families to meet up and attend events. These are well attended and enjoyed. Foster parents also have support groups that they can go to and a buddying system to help them build connections with other fostering families.

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

Risks to children are well understood by the agency. The children's individual plans are detailed and assess risk well. They provide clear strategies for foster parents that help them to respond to children in the most appropriate way. Information about a child's experiences before living with the agency foster parents is recorded and explored. Plans are regularly updated to include new behaviours and information. However, supervising social workers do not follow a consistent approach when completing children's plans. Therefore, sometimes, information that is not up to date remains on plans and can be confusing.

There have been no incidents of restraint. All carers are trained in de-escalation and restraint. Foster carers know how to promote good guidance and boundaries. This helps children to feel safe and secure. Honest conversations are held with children to help them recognise healthy behaviours.

On one occasion, a child has gone missing from home. The foster parents responded appropriately to try to locate the child and call on the services of other safeguarding professionals. However, they failed to report the incident to the agency for over a week. Lessons learned by the agency are used as training material for other foster parents.

Children told the inspectors that they feel safe talking about their worries and concerns with their foster parents. They trust that foster parents will listen to them and act in their best interests. Children also identified supervising social workers as adults who they would share concerns with.

There is good coordination in the agency when children may be a risk of harm. Foster parents know how to respond to incidents or concerns about children. Supervising social workers are aware of any active or potential risks to children and develop plans that help to keep them safe and reduce risks.

The agency has an experienced and diverse panel. Assessments of the prospective foster parents are detailed and comprehensive. The agency decision makers have good oversight of the process and communicative relationships with the agency and panel. Any actions identified through the assessment or review processes are actioned and the outcomes are shared. Carers told the inspectors that they found the assessment process to be detailed and reflective. They felt welcomed by the agency and well supported.

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

The registered manager is well respected by the staff and foster parents. She has a wealth of knowledge about the children cared for by the agency and the fostering families. She is passionate about the care the agency provides children, the support given to foster parents and the agency's ambitions for the future.

Leaders and managers ensure that the agency has a stable and skilled staff team. The agency has safe recruitment practices. Foster parents say that they feel well supported and looked after by the agency.

Foster parents receive regular supervision that monitors their skills and knowledge. Supervision focuses on the children's needs and the well-being of the foster parents. The competency of the foster parents is routinely monitored and then formally assessed through annual reviews.

The agency has a comprehensive suite of training and support available to foster parents and staff, which is provided by the wider organisation. This is presented in a range of formats, including face to face, virtual, podcasts and webinars. When foster parents struggle to complete training, supervising social workers encourage and support them. This includes sitting with foster parents to guide them through the technical aspects of information technology. There is currently a drive to update all foster carers on a new suite of essential training. Training is completed in a timely way and monitored effectively.

The agency has a range of different strategies in place to gain the views of children. This includes face-to-face chats and questionnaires. The use of a QR code helps children to access questionnaires on their mobile phone. Growing technology, such as apps, has not yet been used to engage with children in ways that are likely to be more suited to them.

Leaders and managers have good procedures in place to monitor and audit the quality of the service. The registered manager has good oversight of the care children receive. However, this is not consistently visible on the child's records.

In most cases, children's individual plans meet their needs. There is evidence of good communication with external agencies. However, on one occasion, important information about a child's identity was not discussed effectively with the child's social worker. Opportunities to create plans that meet the child's needs and protect the child from possible emotional harm were missed.

Staff have access to timely supervision that provides opportunities for case discussions and review of compliance issues. Discussions with supervising social workers, regarding not having completed visits to families in a timely way, are not clearly recorded.

Supervising social workers know their allocated children and fostering families well. They also have good knowledge of other families in the agency. This ensures that when staff take leave, there are others in the team who ensure continuity of support for foster parents.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should regularly monitor 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. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that the agency works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 14, paragraph 4.7)
- The registered person should ensure that a written record is kept by the fostering service of each supervision session held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record should be signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the session. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 49, paragraph 24.5)
- The registered person should ensure that 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. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.4)
- The registered person should ensure that staff implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.1)

### **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:** 2696051

**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:** Julia Willmott

**Telephone number:** 01225 255900

**Email address:** Julia.Willmott@thefca.co.uk

## Inspectors

Penelope Kutz, Social Care Inspector

Carla Simkiss, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children’s social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children’s services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2023