

# National Fostering Agency London South

The National Fostering Agency Ltd

National Fostering Agency, Waterside House, 20 Riverside Way, Cowley, Uxbridge  
UB8 2YF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

National Fostering Agency London South is an independent fostering agency. The fostering agency registered in August 2022 and the manager registered in June 2023.

The fostering agency provides a wide range of fostering placements for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short-term, medium-term and long-term placements. It also provides parent and child placements and supports 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency had 116 foster carer households who were providing care to 143 children.

### Inspection dates: 14 to 18 August 2023

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** This is the first inspection of the fostering agency

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** none

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

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

Foster carers and supervising social workers have positive and nurturing relationships with children. Foster carers and supervising social workers understand the needs of children, and this means that children's social, emotional and health needs are met. One child said in their looked after children's review, 'I'm pleased that my social worker found me this house.' Another child said that they, 'felt part of the family.'

Foster carers and supervising social workers help children to settle in their foster homes. Children meet foster carers before they move into their home, wherever possible. Children's guides are printed in a range of languages, including symbols and pictures to help children understand the day-to-day routines and their entitlements. Foster carers and supervising social workers understand the importance of promoting children's religious, linguistic and cultural identity. Foster carers cannot care for children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers until they have undertaken appropriate training. Consequently, children remain in their foster homes for as long as needed.

Foster carers and supervising social workers support children to achieve in education and to have high aspirations. All children are either in school or college. Children achieve good grades in their GCSE and A-Level exams. One child has been offered a place at the University of Oxford. Children spoken to by inspectors have high aspirations, with one wanting to be a doctor and another a football coach. The fostering agency recognises children's progress through achievement awards.

Children enjoy a range of leisure and social activities while in foster care. Children are supported by foster carers and supervising social workers to participate in their chosen activities, such as boxing, football or going to the gym. The fostering agency provides children with opportunities to meet up with other children in foster care to encourage participation and them having fun. The fostering agency provides foster carers with the opportunity to gain discounted entries to theatres, theme parks and other things of interest to children.

Children's views and experiences are valued by the fostering agency. The fostering agency regularly consults with children in relation to their experiences in foster care, using questionnaires and participation events. Responses from children include wanting to learn more about independent living and to have the opportunity to talk about how they feel in foster care. Leaders and managers have created a dedicated participation lead role to ensure that children's experiences influence how care is provided to them.

The fostering agency has a highly effective process for recruiting, assessing and preparing prospective foster carers to care for children in their homes. One prospective carer about to attend the fostering panel for approval said that the

worker involved was 'brilliant' and the process had been 'thorough, enjoyable, helpful and informative.'

Approved foster carers overwhelming report that they are effectively supported by the agency and supervising social workers to carry out their fostering tasks. Consequently, children are cared for by adults who understand their role and responsibilities in helping achieve the best outcomes in foster care.

The fostering agency supports children who are moving on to semi-independent living. Fostering support workers run a transition into independence fun group, which enables children to meet to discuss common issues. Children remain with foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements once they turn 18. This offers young people the familiarity and stability that they need as they continue with their education or preparation for independent living.

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

Children spoken to say that they feel safe in foster care. Children said that foster carers look out for them, keep in touch when they are away from the home and talk to them about keeping safe. A social worker for a child reported that on first coming to the foster placement, the child said, 'For the first time I feel happy and safe in a foster placement. When I walked into the house I felt at home.'

Safeguarding of children is seen as paramount by leaders and managers. Professionals involved with the agency, such as the panel chair and fostering reviewing officer, have no concerns regarding the safeguarding of children in foster care. Children's social workers express confidence in the fostering agency's ability to keep children safe. However, case sampling demonstrates that some risk assessments and safer caring plans for children are not specific to the child's needs and do not include clear strategies for foster carers to follow to reduce risk.

Leaders and managers hold weekly high-risk management meetings, where risks or concerns for children are discussed. This ensures that immediate action and ongoing monitoring takes place to support children and foster carers, until the risk is appropriately managed, and children are safeguarded.

Foster carers and staff receive opportunities to attend appropriate training to enhance their understanding and skills in keeping children safe. Foster carers receive training on therapeutic parenting and de-escalation. For example, this means that foster carers are equipped to respond more effectively to children's triggers which may lead to them engaging in unsafe behaviours.

Leaders and managers have taken action to strengthen protocols when children go missing from care. This ensures that foster carers are clear regarding the action they should take and how incidents of children being missing from care should be reported and recorded. The number of incidents when children go missing from care is low.

Complaints and allegations against foster carers are low in number. When standards of care issues do arise, leaders and managers are effective in taking appropriate action to safeguard children and support foster carers. One foster carer, who had recently been the subject of a standard of care investigation, praised the fostering agency for its 'fair and honest' approach to resolving and identifying faults on both sides and working together, and for learning and developing solutions with forward planning on eradicating any further problems that might have developed in the future.

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

Leaders and managers have worked hard to minimise the impact of a period of change from one large London agency to becoming one of three separate and smaller fostering agencies. There is a clear vision for embedding a culture of openness, learning and reflection, where children are at the centre of practice. The registered manager drives the agenda for change and has high expectations for staff and foster carers but acknowledges that consistency needs to be achieved in some areas of practice to meet these expectations.

Leaders and managers are aware of the shortfalls in practice within the fostering agency. A development plan is in place, which clearly outlines the areas to be addressed and what action needs to be taken. These shortfalls are reflected in the inspection findings and include inconsistencies in the quality and recording of foster carers logs and some foster carers not attending training as part of their development.

Staff are well supported by managers to carry out their roles. Staff have access to a comprehensive and extensive catalogue of training that has been designed to meet their specific roles. Supervision and appraisals take place for staff, but the framework of reflective supervision, which managers have implemented, still has not been firmly embedded in practice.

Leaders and managers have participated in a successful Mockingbird programme in conjunction with support from the fostering network. The programme has made a difference to the quality of support offered to foster carers and the positive outcomes for children linked to the programme. Leaders and managers will be launching a new hub home in the next few months, which will enable more foster carers and children to benefit from the network of support provided.

Leaders and managers have effective systems in place to monitor the progress of children. This ensures that leaders and managers are aware of the changing needs of children and the support foster carers may need. Leaders and managers offer enhanced care packages and one-to-one support to foster carers and children where needed to support progress for children.

The fostering agency panel is managed effectively by an experienced and knowledgeable chair. The constitution of the fostering panel means that

recommendations made to the agency decision-maker are based on clear rationale, supported by a sound understanding of fostering standards.

Leaders and managers have good working relationships with external agencies. The fostering agency responds effectively to placement requests from local authorities and responds quickly to the needs of children in placement through multi-disciplinary discussions with health, education, emotional health and therapeutic services.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that risk assessments and safer caring plans are specific to children in foster care and provide clear strategies for foster carers to follow. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards,' 4.2)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers complete training identified as part of their ongoing development, needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards,' 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that all records kept by the service are compliant with the service's policies and procedures. Specifically, this refers to foster carer logs, staff supervision records, children's case records and foster carer case records. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards,' 25.2)

### **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:** 2688691

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

**Registered provider address:** Outcomes First Group Ltd, Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

**Responsible individual:** Lynn Webb

**Registered manager:** Johnson Shebioba

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## **Inspectors**

Colin Bent, Social Care Inspector

Melvin Davies, Social Care Inspector

Sandra Jacobs-Walls, Social Care Inspector

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