

Futures for Children

Futures for Children Limited

13/13a, Radley Green Farm, Radley Green, Ingatestone, Essex CM4 0LU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of the Futures Group. Following the recent transfer of foster carers from their Kent region, the agency supports 45 fostering households that care for 62 children in London, Kent and the East of England. The agency offers a range of placements, including for parents and children.

The manager registered with Ofsted in November 2019.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 October 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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: 12 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency provides a high level of support to foster carers. This helps foster carers to provide good-quality care that is attuned to children's needs.

Supervising social workers and managers carefully consider children's needs when identifying potential fostering households. This includes an exploration of how foster carers will meet children's cultural needs. Children benefit from well-planned moves that usually include spending time with the foster carers and their children in preparation for moving in. This provides a strong foundation for relationships to grow.

Foster carers ensure that children feel part of the family. Some children remain living with their foster carers after their 18th birthday in 'staying put' arrangements. Other children regularly return as young adults to see their foster carers and spend time with younger brothers and sisters. There are examples of foster carers providing practical and emotional support to children who have moved on to semi-independent living when needed. This is a testament to the close and trusting relationships enjoyed between foster carers and children.

Foster carers demonstrate commitment to the children. Supervising social workers know children well and provide responsive, bespoke support to help foster carers manage more challenging times. Their support for children and foster carers increases when needed. This includes access to additional training and clinical support from the agency's therapist. The agency works effectively with placing local authorities to review children's plans and advocate for additional resources to help children experience stability.

Children's social workers said:

- 'There is a strong bond between the carer and child. [Name of child] feels very safe.'
- 'It is their home, their family, their stability.'
- '[Name of child] is making brilliant progress; it is like seeing a different child.'

Foster carers receive the guidance and support needed to help meet children's emotional needs. The manager and supervising social workers model trauma-informed approaches that are starting to embed in foster carers' responses to children. This helps children to feel understood and secure.

Children are making good progress, and, in some cases, excellent progress in their learning with the support of foster carers. When children experience difficulties in school, foster carers work well with educational professionals to resolve problems quickly.

Foster carers help children to spend time with family and friends. When children are unable to live with their brothers or sisters, the agency helps to identify foster carers who live in the same area. This enables children to see their brothers and sisters regularly in natural ways, for example at the local park and at each other's homes.

Children are encouraged to maintain hobbies and to try new experiences. Children play football, go swimming, attend local youth clubs, produce music and go horse-riding. This helps children gain new skills and increase their self-esteem. These opportunities have also enabled children to make new friendships.

Foster carers find creative ways to help children learn independence skills, including through play. This support is targeted to match the child's developmental age and provided at the child's pace. Foster carers use their detailed knowledge of children's abilities to advocate for specialist assessments to inform planning for adulthood. This helps children to move on with the right levels of support.

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

When safeguarding concerns arise, they are dealt with effectively. Clear guidance is in place for foster carers to follow when children leave home or school without permission or are missing from home. The manager ensures that return-home interviews are arranged following any missing-from-home incidents. Foster carers and children receive additional support to manage behaviour such as self-harm. As a result, children are happier and more settled.

Physical intervention is rarely used. When a child's behaviour indicates this may be needed, foster carers attend relevant training to equip them with the skills to do this safely. Supervising social workers use a variety of tools to assist foster carers' understanding of children's behaviour. This helps reduce the frequency and intensity of incidents and means that children receive sensitive responses when they are not feeling emotionally contained.

All foster carers have attended first-aid and safeguarding training. Training for staff and foster carers is identified and provided to meet the individual needs of children. This includes specific clinical support bespoke to children's functioning.

Supervising social workers support foster carers to develop safe care plans for their households. These plans are shared effectively with birth children to help them adjust to the different rules for each child. This direct work with birth children also enhances their understanding and empathy when children are presenting as angry or aggressive.

The agency has an established process for decision-making about overnight short breaks with other fostering households. On one occasion, this process was not followed in full. As a result, children's current and known risks, including the historical sexualised behaviour of one child, were not fully captured in their plans. The risks were mitigated as safer care practices were followed in the household. Managers also identified learning from serious case reviews that informs planning for

children living together. This learning has been cascaded throughout the agency to improve awareness and decision-making in the future.

Safer recruitment processes are in place for foster carers and staff. Allegations against foster carers are dealt with effectively with appropriate consultation and escalation to the local authority designated officer.

The fostering panel provides a good level of scrutiny and challenge when considering new applicants. Panel members receive regular training and benefit from a proactive panel advisor who shares learning from serious case reviews and consultations undertaken by the agency.

Assessments of new applicants are suitable. Annual reviews are facilitated by an independent reviewing officer who oversees completion of statutory checks. Some annual reviews lack detailed information about concerns relating to foster carers' practice and do not always contain the views of birth children and other relevant individuals who know the children well. This does not ensure that the agency decision-maker has all the information they require when making decisions about foster carers' ongoing suitability.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is led by an appropriately experienced and qualified manager. The recent transfer of families from the Kent region has been managed effectively, with the same managers remaining in the service.

The manager knows the children and fostering families well because of a carefully planned handover. She leads a learning culture with a clear development plan and the aim of upskilling staff and foster carers to deliver trauma-informed care.

Staff morale is high. Staff and foster carers feel supported by an accessible manager. Staff receive good-quality supervision sessions and guidance that incorporates case management and staff well-being.

Foster carers are complimentary about the expertise and consistency of support offered by the manager and team. This includes access to a helpful out-of-hours service.

External professionals report good working relationships with the agency. These positive relationships are maintained even when the agency is providing appropriate challenge.

Management's monitoring of incidents is good. The manager has good systems in place for maintaining oversight of actions that need escalating. Some records do not reflect the direct work that has been undertaken with foster carers when addressing potential concerns.

The manager has implemented learning from care-experienced adults about accessing their care records. There are excellent examples of foster carers and supervising social workers writing to children. This captures children's time with foster carers using understandable and non-shaming language that children can access now and in the future.

The manager completes helpful reviews of the quality of care provided by the agency. These reports demonstrate the involvement of children and foster carers and how their views have been used to make improvements to policy and practice.

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

Recommendations

- The registered provider should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. This includes ensuring that any concerns are fully and accurately reported and that the views of placing local authorities, birth children and other relevant individuals are obtained to inform decision-making. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 29, paragraph 13.8)
- The registered provider should ensure that they only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs. In particular, the provider should carefully explore how foster carers will manage the needs and behaviours of children visiting for short stays. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 32, paragraph 15.1)
- The registered provider should ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 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: SC057840

Registered provider: Futures for Children Limited

Registered provider address: The Masters House, College Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6YQ

Responsible individual: Nicholas Barnsby

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Inspectors

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

Mary Costello, Social Care Inspector

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