

Child Care Bureau Fostering Services

Child Care Bureau Limited

First Floor, Units 11 to 13, Elgar Business Centre, Moseley Road, Worcestershire WR2 6NJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency registered with Ofsted in 2004. In June 2018, the agency became part of a large, privately owned national organisation. The agency offers a wide range of placement types for children, including emergency, respite, short and long term, bridging, parent and child, unaccompanied children and young people and young adults 'staying put'.

At the time of the inspection, 76 children were living in 49 fostering households.

The registered manager is appropriately qualified and experienced.

Inspection dates: 27 November to 1 December 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	good
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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: 22 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points and form safe and secure attachments with their foster parents and their families. Foster parents develop and maintain relationships with children that enhance the children's sense of belonging. One child said that they 'love' living with their foster parents. Another child referred to their foster parents as 'mum' and 'dad'.

Children enjoy long-term and stable placements. This is because foster parents are committed to providing the children with loving homes. Permanency for children is a focus with the agency actively supporting foster parents to apply for special guardianship. One child is in the process of being adopted by their current foster parents.

Children benefit from resilient foster parents who, during extremely difficult periods in their lives, consistently demonstrate their commitment to their foster children. Foster parents keep children at the forefront of their decision-making, which means that children are provided with continued support and stability in their foster homes during difficult times. One child referred to their carer as 'amazing' for what they had overcome.

The agency provides parent and child placements. This is a unique and bespoke service that ensures that children are not separated from their parents during care proceedings. Foster parents provide a nurturing and supportive environment where parents have the opportunity to develop the parenting skills necessary for their child to flourish. Because of this bespoke support, one parent has been able to move with their child back into the community.

Children are supported to maintain relationships with their brothers and sisters. Over half of the children supported by the agency are living with their brothers and sisters. Where children do not live with their siblings, foster parents go above and beyond to ensure that children keep in touch with their family members, including those living at a distance. For example, one foster parent travels to the north of England to support their foster children to have family time. The foster parent has also facilitated the children's family coming to stay with them. The carer ensures that the children are regularly taken to places in their hometown that hold special memories for them.

All children are in education. When mainstream school is not suitable, children are supported to attend alternative provision. One child commented on how the supervising social worker was 'instrumental' in securing their current educational arrangements through strong advocacy. As a result, this child is settled and doing well with their learning. Furthermore, children are supported to engage in education post-16. A number of children attend college and one child has recently received a

distinction in health and social care studies. Three young people now attend university.

Children's health needs are consistently met to a high standard. Children have access to local health services and foster parents manage children's health effectively. Children with complex health needs are provided with exceptional support and are making remarkable progress. For example, one child who was born with significant health needs is making strong progress and is meeting all of their developmental milestones. Children's mental health is prioritised by the agency. The agency's 'Invictus' service provides clinical support for children who experience complex social and emotional difficulties. Research-based practice is used to develop resources for children to help maintain and improve their emotional well-being.

Research has also been used to identify and promote the importance of life-story work and later life letters for children. This has resulted in well-written letters being prepared in readiness for children to receive them at the right time. Foster parents commented on how beneficial these are for children.

Participation is a real strength of the agency. The children are encouraged and supported to participate in a number of activities and events throughout the year. This includes events such as Halloween, Christmas, bake sales, swap shop, and the opportunity to partake in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. One child and their fostering family helped to create a short film with the agency to share their experiences of fostering. Children say they feel 'proud' to be part of the agency. As a result of the care they receive, children collectively made the decision to give something back to the community by organising a fundraiser to help several homeless charities. The hard work of the children was recognised by the local newspaper. Furthermore, children are encouraged by their foster parents to engage and participate in hobbies and local clubs. This not only provides the children with enjoyable experiences but also enhances their social and emotional development.

Supervising social workers and fostering support workers are innovative in their practice and enthusiastic about the support they provide. Children speak highly of the relationships they have built with these staff and say that they feel confident to talk to them about any worries or concerns. This is supported by comments from local authority social workers who said that staff from the agency 'go above and beyond' for the children and children always speak positively about the staff and time they have with them. Additionally, the agency supports 'staying put' arrangements for young people. The 'Bridge to Foster' scheme supports children to move successfully from residential care to foster care.

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

Recruitment of foster parents is safe and thorough, and effective systems are in place to ensure that the agency recruits carers who share the same child-centred values and ethos as the agency. Assessments of foster parents are detailed and of a good standard. The agency ensures that foster parents receive good-quality training

and development opportunities pre- and post-approval to equip them to skilfully parent. Foster parents speak positively about the support and training that they receive.

Detailed initial risk assessments are carried out by staff in the referrals hub to assist in finding the right family for each child. These assessments outline known risks in detail and provide foster parents with information, resources and research relevant to the match. Each child's risk assessment sets out action points, including any training or support needed to help the foster parent provide care that promotes the child's welfare. Risk assessments are updated annually as a minimum and are considered at the child's statutory review. This helps to ensure that risk management plans are kept under review and that they identify children's risks and the agreed strategies to reduce risk.

Staff know the children and any areas of risk well. Supervising social workers work collaboratively and make it a priority to be aware of the circumstances of each foster parent and the children they care for. There is clear guidance for staff and carers to follow when risks arise, such as missing from care or issues of self-harm. Safe caring plans are available, including in a child-friendly format for the children. This means that any member of the team can respond quickly when issues arise or there are moments of crisis. The in-house on-call system provides helpful and reassuring support for carers out of hours when challenges arise.

The children are supported to understand risk and to take responsibility for their behaviour and actions. Supervising social workers and fostering support workers are proactive in carrying out direct work with children to help them understand risk and to help children identify their 'push/pull' factors. Children have benefited from direct work in a range of areas, including online safety, cyber bullying, child sexual exploitation, consent and mental health and self-harm. Direct work is creative and innovative and draws on research in practice.

When children make allegations, these are responded to quickly and investigated thoroughly by the agency. The registered manager works closely with partner agencies to ensure that matters are concluded promptly. Where needed, the outcomes of enquiries into allegations are considered at panel and appropriate decisions are made to ensure that children are safeguarded.

Fostering households receive at least two unannounced visits annually by the agency. These are carried out by different supervising social workers and the registered manager to ensure that a range of people are seeing the home, the carers and the children. During these visits, the children are spoken to alone and their bedrooms are seen. This provides an opportunity to ensure that children are happy and safe. Furthermore, the children benefit from time away from the home with supervising social workers and fostering support workers. The children speak positively about these opportunities.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is suitably experienced and qualified, stepping into the role in October 2022 after being the team manager for several years. She has expert knowledge of the agency and has been instrumental in addressing the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. She is child-centred and ensures that children are at the heart of the ethos of the agency and every decision made. She models her expectations, which helps to create a shared ethos throughout the team.

There is a core and stable staff team. The staff are extremely positive about working for the agency and the work they do with the foster parents and children. Smaller caseloads mean that the staff can build relationships with and deliver a high level of support to their carers and children. Staff enjoy the work they do and are actively involved in events and activities for children.

The registered manager ensures that staff receive regular supervision. Supervision is detailed and reflective and considers the progress of foster parents and children. Furthermore, supervision considers the welfare of staff, which is prioritised by the agency. As a result, staff say they feel nurtured by their manager. The agency has trialled a four-day working week. As a result, this and flexible working options are available for staff, which helps to support their mental and emotional well-being.

Staff have regular team meetings that provide an opportunity for them to come together for collective reflection. Preparation includes reviewing research, which is then discussed as a group and implemented into practice. The advanced practitioner carries out regular learning reviews, with the most recent looking at the topic of self-harm. The learning from this has been incorporated into work with foster parents and children.

There are positive working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. The registered manager and staff team advocate on behalf of children, and, when needed, they professionally challenge. Professionals, including commissioning teams, are complimentary about the agency and the work it does. Furthermore, feedback from foster parents, families and the children is overwhelmingly positive.

Panel members are knowledgeable and suitably skilled. The panel's personal and professional diversity supports good decision-making for children. The panel provides thorough quality assurance of assessments. An experienced panel chair provides clear reasons for the recommendations made. This is further enhanced by the agency decision-maker, who makes detailed and reasoned decisions promptly. An independent reviewing officer provides an additional measure of scrutiny of the approval of foster parents. Foster parents' annual reviews are comprehensive and are completed within the required time frames.

The registered manager has robust and effective monitoring systems in place. She carries out regular audits and draws on those done by her team manager. She has recognised as part of this inspection that risk assessments and safe caring plans are not always updated as promptly as they could be between statutory reviews.

However, risk is discussed routinely in foster parents' supervision. The shortfall in recording does not impact the safeguarding or the care children receive.

The records kept about children do not always contain key documents from the child's placing authority, such as care and education plans. This means that foster parents may not have the most up-to-date and relevant information for their child. However, to compensate, supervising social workers routinely take minutes of meetings, which are clearly recorded and shared. Although staff chase missing documents from local authorities, it is not always escalated effectively when responses are lacking. The registered manager has developed an escalation flowchart to help guide staff practice. This administrative issue does not impact the safeguarding or care children receive.

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations. (Regulation 17 (3))	27 January 2024

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: SC034788

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Inspectors

Stacie Sharpe, Social Care Inspector

Lydia Isaac, Social Care Inspector

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