

Brighter Futures Fostercare

Brighter Futures Foster Care Limited

Warlies Park House, Horseshoe Hill, Upshire Hill, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 3SL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Brighter Futures Foster Care is an independent fostering agency which is part of the National Fostering Group, supporting foster carers in the east and south of England. At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency was supporting 55 foster carers who were caring for 66 children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2019.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 December 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 13 January 2020

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 receive the care and encouragement they need to make exceptional progress from their starting points. Foster carers are aspirational for children and support them to enjoy opportunities that enhance their lives. This includes children participating in trips and expeditions to other countries, allowing them to experience different cultures. These are once-in-a-lifetime experiences that help children build positive memories, confidence and skills.

Foster carers receive high levels of support and therapeutic guidance to help them build secure and trusting relationships with children. As a result, children benefit from stability in fostering households that provide them with a sense of belonging and permanence. When right for children, and in line with children's plans, the agency supports foster carers to care for children under less intrusive legal arrangements, such as adoption or special guardianship orders.

Children are involved in decisions about where they want to live and who with. Foster carers ensure children receive warm and sensitive welcomes to their home. Planning for moves is centred on children's past experiences and helps children to settle quickly. Foster carers are supported to understand children's developmental needs. This equips them to provide children with attuned and patient care that helps children to develop, in many cases from complex starting points.

Children's views and preferences are central to planning for children moving from a children's home to a fostering family under the agency's 'bridge to foster' offer. This model of practice is innovative, providing foster carers and children with consistent and accessible therapeutic support from a clinical psychologist who enhances the team around the child.

All children are accessing education and the majority are making excellent progress. Foster carers benefit from access to expert support from an education professional in the agency who helps secure the right resources and assessments that children are entitled to. As a result, children are meeting their potential and achieving qualifications that will positively impact on their adult lives.

Foster carers encourage children to take on age-appropriate independence. Children have part-time jobs, undertake volunteer work and carry out household tasks that help them to develop the skills they require for the future. The agency is proactive in planning for children to remain with their carers after their 18th birthday in 'staying put' arrangements. This offers children an increased sense of acceptance and permanency with their fostering family.

Supervising social workers work effectively with other professionals to progress children's plans. This includes challenging outside agencies to ensure that children's rights are being met.

Foster carers feel highly valued by the agency and appreciate the personal touches and accessible support offered by their supervising social workers and the manager. As a result, many foster carers remain with the agency for long periods of time.

Supervising social workers have an extensive knowledge of the families they are supporting. This includes a good knowledge of the needs of the birth children, who they value as part of the fostering family.

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

Supervising social workers spend time alone with children to help build and maintain positive relationships with them. Consequently, children have an additional trusted adult they can talk to about any worries. Supervising social workers provide children with direct support when needed. This includes teaching children about online safety and addressing concerns around bullying.

There have been few incidents of children going missing from home. There are clear procedures for foster carers to follow when this occurs. Supervising social workers help foster carers reflect on any incidents. This helps foster carers understand the reasons behind the child's behaviour and to manage their own anxieties, in addition to providing the child with a caring response.

The agency is highly responsive to foster carers and children at times of crisis and when there is an escalation in children's behaviours that challenge adults. This includes increased therapeutic input from supervising social workers and regular one-to-one sessions with an appropriately trained clinician to help minimise endings for children.

Managers ensure that foster carers have the training they need to care for children safely. All foster carers have completed training in safeguarding, safer caring and first aid, in line with the agency's mandatory training requirements. However, not all adults living in the fostering household have had safer caring training to help them understand the risk of allegations. The agency ensures that foster carers who care for children with complex health needs have completed the specialist training and have the support they need to manage these needs confidently.

Managers provide a strong response to safeguarding concerns, with a clear focus on the safety of the child. When necessary, they challenge practice that falls below expectations. This includes the practice of external professionals. Concerns about foster carers are shared quickly with all relevant professionals. Managers ensure that foster carers have access to independent support to provide guidance and assistance.

The fostering panel is made up of people with diverse experience and includes a care-experienced adult and a foster carer. The panel is well led by an experienced panel chair and supported by a conscientious panel adviser who regularly delivers training to the panel members. As a result, fostering panel provides effective scrutiny

of prospective foster carers and has a good understanding of its role in reviewing foster carers who have been subject to safeguarding or standards of care issues.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is led by a qualified, well-experienced manager who leads a culture of high warmth and high expectations. Foster carers and staff speak very highly of the support and leadership she provides. This includes aftercare that continues when children and carers move on from the agency. One care leaver said the support the manager has offered goes 'above and beyond' and described her as a 'shining light'.

The manager has established an agency with a strong identity that staff and foster carers say has a family feel within a larger organisation. The manager continues to provide a high level of support to foster carers, giving her a comprehensive knowledge of the fostering households and the children they care for.

Management monitoring systems are effective in identifying and maintaining oversight of practice and of incidents involving children. However, there remain some inconsistencies in the level of detail in staff recordings, including in the health and safety home checklists. There has also been one instance of a delay in following the agency's exemption policy for updating the agency decision-maker about a change. The manager has a clear development plan in place to address variations in practice, and the energy and capability to embed improvements quickly.

The manager uses research and reflective practice to facilitate regular learning and continued professional development for staff. She values the contributions of her team and ensures that their views and ideas are used to influence policy that better reflects the needs of children and the challenges that foster carers experience.

The manager ensures that children are provided with a variety of ways to share their views. A new electronic tool is accessible to children to use, either alone or with an adult. This approach has been successful in increasing children's contributions to their own and their foster carers' review meetings. The tool supports management oversight of children's feedback. As a result, children's views do not get lost and can be tracked over time at a management level or in discussion with the child. Action is consistently taken in response to children's feedback, helping children feel listened to.

The manager models child-centred practice and is a strong advocate for children, foster carers and staff. She provides effective challenge on behalf of children when decisions are not in their best interests. As a result, children have remained in 'staying put' arrangements and accessed the most appropriate education provision, resulting in improved educational attainment. Her practice guidance and commitment to obtaining the resources children need has positively impacted on children's experiences and outcomes.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including children of sufficient age and understanding. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 41, paragraph 20.9)
- The registered person should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. In particular, ensure that health and safety checklists consistently contain sufficiently detailed information, and that the agency's exemption policy is followed without delay. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.1)

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: SC476965

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Registered provider address: Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: Neil McCarthy

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