

TACT Fostering Yorkshire & North East

The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Innovation House, Coniston Court, PO Box 137, Blyth NE24 9FJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) is a charitable organisation which operates across England, Scotland and Wales. This agency, which is one of seven independent fostering agencies in England, moved to an entirely home-based service in October 2021. It provides short-term, long-term, emergency, and parent and child foster homes.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 57 approved fostering households and 76 children placed with its foster carers.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 February 2025

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 11 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children experience stability with their foster carers. When children need to move urgently to live with a new carer, the manager often identifies an alternative carer in the agency and, where possible, whom the children have previously met. This helps to reduce children's anxieties about moving homes. Many carers stay in contact with children after they have moved on, while some children remain with their carers into adulthood. Some carers have secured legal orders, so they have parental responsibility for the children that they care for. These actions help to strengthen children's support networks and provide them with a sense of permanence and belonging.

Foster carers say they feel well supported. They can access support from the agency's well-being practitioner and psychologist to help them to better understand and manage children's behaviours. In addition, they can access personal support from the psychologist for issues such as compassion fatigue. This helps to build carers' resilience and contributes towards children experiencing stability.

Children speak positively about their foster carers and the carers' supervising social workers. Supervising social workers visit both the foster carers and the children regularly. Children say they enjoy these visits and that they help them to get to know the supervising social workers well. This provides children with an additional trusted adult. One professional commented that they felt that the carer's supervising social worker knows the child better than the child's local authority social worker.

The manager makes good use of the national education resources available to the region. Supervising social workers and carers can request support from education professionals to help them to challenge decisions and to provide additional support with children's learning. For one child, this resulted in an illegal exclusion being overturned.

Children say they enjoy the various types of respite that is available to them. This is often creative in its approach to disguise the stigma associated with 'respite'. This helps children to feel valued and provides additional support to carers. Additionally, the agency arranges a variety of activities for children, which provides opportunities for children to develop their own support networks. This includes residential stays. However, the agency is not always mindful when arranging gender-specific events. This could result in some children feeling excluded and may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Foster carers understand the risks associated with children in their care. However, the manager does not have a process in place to monitor and evaluate children's

risks and behaviours. As a result, carers are not provided with information or guidance that helps them to keep children safe.

Children rarely go missing. When they do, carers inform the appropriate agencies to help them to locate children. However, the agency does not provide carers with individual plans for those children who go missing, so carers know what steps they are expected to take to help to find their child quickly.

The manager ensures that each fostering household has a plan to help to keep the fostering family safe. However, these are not always in place in a timely manner and are not consistently updated when new risks emerge. This prevents foster carers from having access to the necessary information to help to keep them safe. In addition, these plans are not always followed by the foster carer. This has resulted in one child becoming distressed when exposed to another child's behaviour.

The manager does not ensure that staff always exercise professional curiosity when reviewing foster carers' records. This practice has led to identified risks not being mitigated, and foster carers not always being held to account.

When children make a complaint or allegation about a foster carer, they are dealt with quickly. The necessary safeguarding steps are taken to help to keep children safe. However, records of these incidents do not consistently reflect management oversight that includes a clear outcome, evaluation of the incident or whether the child has been kept informed about their complaint. This prevents the manager from identifying any patterns or lessons learned. It may also mean children do not feel listened to.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Leaders and managers have high aspirations for the children they are responsible for. The manager knows the foster carers and children well through his visible presence across the agency. However, the manager does not have effective monitoring systems in place to demonstrate how these aspirations can be achieved.

Documents that assess whether a carer can meet the needs of a child do not consistently reflect an evaluation of the foster carer's level of skill, knowledge, training and wider environment. Foster carers do not consistently have the most recent statutory information they need to provide children with appropriate care.

The escalation process is not followed by staff and is therefore ineffective. Staff do not always review foster carers' records in the expected timescales. This creates the potential for delays in significant information being acted on.

Foster carers do not always maintain records in the required time frames. For one child, this resulted in unnecessary in delay in the local authority being informed about an incident. Supervision records logging interaction between staff and carers

do not consistently address challenges to practice. Therefore, foster carers are not always held to account for matters concerning their care of the children and their record-keeping. Not all actions taken by the agency to help a child are documented, meaning a child accessing their records may feel like they were not well supported. Some documents are not signed and dated.

The manager does not have effective systems in place to monitor practice and maintain oversight of any issues or concerns. This hinders his ability to establish how well children are kept safe and the level of progress they are making. Consequently, managers are slow to respond to the development needs of staff and foster carers.

Foster carers, staff and panel members are all offered training relevant to their roles. However, not all foster carers have completed their statutory training and the agency's mandatory safeguarding training within the required timescales. While the manager holds some carers to account by requesting that they return to panel for review, this is inconsistent. Consequently, some foster carers may not have the knowledge and skills required to provide children with safe care.

The fostering panel is a strength of the agency. Its membership is diverse and includes an adult who is care-experienced. Panel members appropriately challenge gaps in assessments to help them to make safe recommendations about approving prospective carers. They also scrutinise the actions of supervising social workers at review panels. However, agency records do not reflect whether recommendations made at these panels have been acted on.

The manager has not provided Ofsted with his review of the quality of care provided to children. Furthermore, he has also not sent the revised statement of purpose and the children's guide within the required timescales. This prevents Ofsted from maintaining oversight of the effectiveness of how the agency is operating.

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
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect.</p> <p>The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for—</p> <p>written records to be kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and of the action taken in response. (Regulation 12)</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that there is clear management oversight for all allegations and complaints made against foster carers, which includes the outcome of any investigation and an evaluation of this outcome.</p> <p>The registered manager must ensure that it is clearly recorded how children are informed of the outcome of any complaint or allegation that they make.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that there is an assessment for each child that clearly sets out the risks that each child faces, and how foster carers are expected to mitigate and manage these risks. The registered manager must also set out how foster carers are expected to respond to any behaviours associated with any of those risks. This is in relation to national minimum standard 4.5.</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission. (Regulation 13).</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>

<p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that they meet the shortfalls identified that relate to national minimum standards 5.1, 5.7 and 5.10.</p>	
<p>The registered provider and the registered manager must carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8)</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that they meet the shortfalls identified that relate to national minimum standards 25.1, 25.2, 25.3, 25.4, 26.2 and 26.5.</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.</p> <p>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)</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must ensure that they meet the shortfalls identified that relate to national minimum standards 12.3 and 31.2. The registered person must develop an effective escalation policy referring to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 when contacting the placing authority and if necessary challenge the independent reviewing officer (IRO) and escalate the matter to the director of children's services.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that foster carers complete all mandatory safeguarding training in line with the agency's policy.</p> <p>The registered person should ensure that all foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval.</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>

<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35)</p> <p>In particular, the registered person must submit reports made under regulation 35 and national minimum standard 25 to Ofsted at least annually, although agencies may choose to submit these reports more frequently.</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide; and</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4)</p>	<p>1 May 2025</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, including the recording of decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 26.5)
- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of those significant to children are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. (‘Fostering Services: national minimum standards’, 1.7)

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: SC448336

Registered provider: The Adolescent and Children's Trust

Registered provider address: 98 Station Road, Sidcup DA15 7BY

Responsible individual: Andrew Elvin

Registered manager: Richard Leech

Telephone number: 0113 2401999

Email address: yorkshire-northeast@tactcare.org.uk

Inspector

Julia Hagan, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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