

Sandwell Children's Trust

Adoption

Sandwell Children's Trust

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, PO Box 2374, Oldbury B69 3DE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this voluntary adoption agency

The agency registered with Ofsted on 7 March 2018 and is owned by Sandwell Children's Trust, which is a private limited company. Since 1 April 2019, the agency joined a regional adoption agency.

Most of the agency's adoption services are carried out by the regional adoption agency. These services include the recruitment and assessment of adopters, adoption panel, family finding, post-adoption support, and life-story work. Other elements of the adoption work, such as producing the child permanence reports, agency decision-making and later-life letters, are carried out by the children's social care teams from Sandwell Children's Trust.

Inspection dates: 16 to 20 February 2026

Overall experiences and progress of service users, taking into account	good
How well children, young people and adults are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

The voluntary adoption agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 5 December 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of service users: good

Children develop warm, trusting and secure relationships with their adopters. As a result, they settle well and make progress from their starting points. Adopters demonstrate a clear understanding of their children's needs and lived experiences. As a result, they are equipped to help children feel safe and stable, promoting continuity of care.

Careful and considered planning ensures that children are matched effectively with their adopters. Social workers know their children well and use this knowledge to inform matching decisions. The agency's joined-up approach with the regional adoption agency (RAA) supports well-informed and timely decision-making that is in line with children's needs.

Early permanence is considered from the earliest stage of planning. Social workers think carefully about whether this is the right plan for each child. The agency and the RAA work well together to identify carers who can offer foster-to-adopt placements, helping children move quickly into their prospective adoptive homes. For one child, this has meant that they were placed with their adopters following discharge from hospital, with their final adoption hearing completed within 7 months.

The agency is taking an innovative approach to identifying adopters for children who may wait longer for an adoptive family. Leaders have worked closely with the RAA to explore different ways of helping children find their adoptive families. This includes attending local community events and making effective use of inter-agency adoption arrangements.

Children's health needs are well met by their adopters. Adopters have the opportunity to meet with the medical adviser before adoption. The medical adviser demonstrates flexibility and commitment in arranging these meetings. This helps adopters develop an understanding of their child's health needs and how best to respond to these once the child is placed.

Adoptive families have provided positive feedback about the support they receive. Adopters report feeling well informed throughout the process and able to turn to social workers who have the experience and knowledge needed to guide them effectively. One adopter said, 'Our social worker helped us focus on what was important to us, and this was handled sensitively.'

Adopters have post-adoption support plans in place, and they feel they receive timely and helpful support from the agency when needed.

Children are provided with life-story books and later-life letters. The life-story books are bright, colourful and child friendly, helping children make sense of their early

experiences. Later-life letters are detailed and provide children, as they grow older, the opportunity to understand the decisions made throughout their adoption journey.

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

The agency's strong safeguarding arrangements keep children safe. Leaders and managers clearly understand their roles and responsibilities, ensuring that children's wellbeing is promoted.

Safeguarding practices are embedded across the agency. Social workers have a clear and consistent understanding of their safeguarding roles in the agency. Training is thorough and is understood by all staff and adopters. As a result, they are equipped to recognise children's vulnerabilities and respond appropriately to emerging risks.

The assessment and preparation of adopters is carried out in the RAA. Assessments of prospective adopters are detailed, analytical and well evidenced. Effective joint working between the agency and the RAA ensures that approved adopters are well prepared and able to meet the needs of children waiting for adoption.

Since the last inspection, there have been no allegations. However, the agency has clear systems in place should concerns arise. The agency has strong links with the local authority designated officer and relevant safeguarding teams to ensure that any concerns are managed accordingly and in line with safeguarding procedures.

The agency receives few complaints. The adoption manager promptly and appropriately investigates any complaints received. Concerns are explored in detail, with outcomes clearly recorded and shared. This promotes learning and contributes to ongoing improvements in practice across the agency.

The agency prioritises permanence for children. The development of permanence hub has strengthened practice and supports timely, well-considered decision-making for children. Adoption social workers know their children well and have a strong understanding of their individual needs. They use this knowledge effectively during the matching process, contributing to children being placed in safe and stable homes. As a result, adoption disruptions are rare. Since the previous inspection in 2022, there has been one adoption breakdown.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is led by a suitably qualified and experienced manager who has high aspirations for the agency and the children it supports. Their strong leadership promotes a culture of learning and development that ensures that children remain central to all decision-making. They are supported by a committed leadership team that shares their drive and passion to ensure that children achieve the best possible outcomes.

Leaders and managers create an environment where positive practice can flourish. Staff are suitably qualified, highly experienced and dedicated to their role. They receive regular supervision and training, which supports them in reflecting and developing their practice. Social workers report feeling valued and part of a supportive team. They describe their caseloads as 'manageable', which enables them to provide high-quality support to children and adopters. Social workers say that leaders and managers are approachable and their views are listened to and valued.

A key strength of the agency is its highly effective and fully embedded monitoring systems. Leaders and managers have access to comprehensive and up-to-date information that enables them to track children's stability, progress and outcomes. As a result, any new concerns can be promptly identified and addressed. Leaders and managers have full oversight of all practices, which ensures that there is full compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements. A robust range of internal and external checks identifies areas for improvement, supports change and ensures close monitoring of progress. This leads to consistently high-quality practice across the agency.

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have introduced new structures and practice models that have further improved the service. These developments have had a clear and positive impact on outcomes for children and adopters. For example, the dedicated permanence hub has strengthened the focus on timely, well-planned permanence. Leaders and managers, alongside the RAA, have introduced targeted recruitment strategies that widen the pool of adopters, including work to attract adopters from the global majority and LGBTQ+ communities.

The agency's 'STAR' practice model (strengths based, trauma informed and relational) is securely embedded across the agency and consistently informs practice. As a result, staff demonstrate increased confidence and a reflective approach to their work. Decision-making is purposeful and clearly prioritises children's best interests.

Leaders and managers maintain excellent operational oversight of the RAA. Their partnership work with local authorities is highly effective and well established. The agency has appointed key staff who provide strong and consistent strategic and operational links with the RAA. A well-structured programme of meetings ensures regular scrutiny, effective information-sharing and coordinated planning across agencies.

The agency benefits from an experienced panel chair who works closely with other panel chairs in the RAA. These regular meetings support the sharing of best practices, drive improvements and promote consistency across the service. The adoption panel keeps children firmly at the centre of all decisions. Panel members show a clear focus on each child's needs, experiences and long-term outcomes. Their decision-making is transparent and supported by clear, well-reasoned analysis.

The adoption adviser provides strong support to practitioners, helping them make sound, evidence-based decisions. Their robust quality assurance ensures that

reports presented to the panel are clear, analytical and comprehensive. This contributes to confident, well-informed decision-making across the service.

The agency decision-makers makes careful and balanced decisions based on their evaluation of information presented. Decisions are timely and help children achieve permanence without delay. The agency decision-makers speak passionately about their role and their commitment to improving outcomes for children. They promote the child's voice and provide feedback to children and adopters that is thoughtful, personalised and sensitive to each child's situation.

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 Voluntary Adoption Agencies and The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005, any other relevant legislation, and the national minimum standards.

Voluntary adoption agency details

Unique reference number: 1264707

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