

National Fostering Agency

The National Fostering Agency Limited
Unit 2450, Regents Court, The Crescent, Birmingham Business Park, Birmingham
B37 7YE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering agency is part of a nationwide company. There are 298 carers in 173 households caring for 269 children. Ofsted registered the manager in June 2018 and she is studying for a management qualification.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 October 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

Date of last inspection: 5 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Leaders and managers have made substantial improvements to the service since the last inspection.
- Children make good progress from their starting points. For example, there are particularly high rates of school attendance.
- Carers engage well with the children and help them to do as well as possible. Children often remain in placement for many years.
- The needs of children from other countries or who have disabilities are met well.
- All the staff are striving to raise the quality of the service.
- Carers, their children, and foster children receive good support from the supervising social workers and other staff.
- The agency recognises and celebrates success effectively. Carers and children enjoy a wide range of activities and feel that they are part of the service.
- Carers help children to feel safe and substantially reduce the risks they face.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some carers have not completed the mandatory training within the required timescales, which increases risks to children slightly and reduces those carers' engagement with the agency.
- The training programme for carers does not include all the necessary subjects.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 20.4) This is with regard to ensuring that all carers complete mandatory training courses within the prescribed timescales and that mandatory training includes health and hygiene, and medicine management and administration.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Experienced and new carers have a very positive impression of the agency. One carer said, 'I'm proud to foster for an agency that goes above and beyond for carers.' They appreciate the acknowledgements that they receive from the agency. Recent improvements mean that a specific team undertakes the recruitment and assessment of new carers. This has improved the quality and consistency of the work. Carers show a great commitment to their foster children, for example when addressing children's long-term physical needs.

Most children show good progress from their starting points. For example, their relationships with their families often improve, as does their attendance at school. Overall, children thrive. One child said, 'I have been able to [learn] different [skills] that I never thought I could do.' The agency now has a range of ways of obtaining and acting on the views of all the children. The wide-ranging and well-organised social events are a highlight.

Carers feel very positive about their training programme, and the supplementary seminars led by supervising social workers. The high number of venues, and other improvements, have made a significant improvement to attendance rates, especially among the partners of main carers. However, further work is necessary to ensure that all carers complete mandatory courses in a timely way and that the programme includes all the required topics.

Children from overseas are often placed with carers who have some first-hand understanding of their faith or language. This helps children bond with their carers and to feel settled. Carers appreciate the involvement that they have over placement decisions. A high percentage of children benefit from living with their own brothers and sisters, often for many years. Children who live outside their home areas receive the support that they need.

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

Carers keep children safe. Through effective training and close liaison with other professionals, carers understand the risks that children face. For example, some children occasionally return home late. Carers implement the correct procedures to keep them safe, depending on the needs of each child. Very few children go missing from their foster homes, and carers know about potential threats such as radicalisation.

Carers receive training that helps them to deal with real situations. They appreciate this and feel that it helps them sustain placements. One carer said, 'I've used the tactics and tips with [my foster child] and now he's a completely different child.'

Occasionally, carers are the subject of allegations. The agency's staff deal with these instances appropriately and very few are substantiated. The staff challenge other

professionals to meet children's needs effectively and in a timely way. This helps to avoid unnecessary delays.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Following the last inspection, the leadership team compiled a thorough action plan. The service now complies with the regulations and is focused firmly on the needs of the children. One consequence of the improvement programme was further turnover of staff. However, this has now stabilised.

Improvements to the monitoring of the whole service, including placements that end in an unplanned way, have resulted in better engagement with all carers. This process has been vital to the improvements to the service and adherence to its statement of purpose. The panel provides robust analysis and recommendations.

Ofsted registered the manager in June 2018 and she is undertaking a relevant management qualification. She is managing the service well and encouraging an open and celebratory environment.

Staff feel well supported. One member of staff said, 'We understand our roles better now.' Another said that she feels re-invigorated. The management and development of staff is effective, and supervising social workers appreciate working from home and having manageable caseloads. They have good local knowledge of their areas, which benefits carers and children.

The supervising social workers engage well with foster children. They show an excellent understanding of the foster children's needs and ensure that they are making progress. Children acknowledged this in their feedback to inspectors.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC470279

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