

Sunflower Fostering

The National Fostering Agency Ltd

The Old School, School Lane, Weston-under-Lizard, Shifnal TF11 8JZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A large national provider of children's services operates this independent fostering agency providing children with long-term and short-term care.

The agency re-registered as the National Fostering Agency Ltd in May 2023. This is the agency's first inspection since re-registration.

The registered manager is suitably skilled and experienced.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for 37 children living in 24 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 April 2024

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: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from stability. Many children have lived with their carers for a significant period and over half of the children live with their siblings. Some children have benefited from being able to remain living with their carers when they reach adulthood. Other children have been helped to move to live with family members. The agency also supports children who live in residential care to move to foster care. Carers have adopted one child and a further four children are being adopted with the agency's support.

The referral and matching process is comprehensive and the agency strives to ensure they gain all of the necessary information from the child's placing authority. This helps to ensure that children's needs are known and that appropriate support can be offered to promote the child's well-being. Additional training and resources mean that carers are well equipped when children come into their care. Children receive a welcome guide and information about the carers. Some carers have created virtual welcome videos of their homes to help reduce children's anxieties.

Children make good progress. This can be seen across all aspects of children's health, education, and emotional, social and psychological well-being. As a result of trusted relationships and safe and nurturing homes, children thrive and engage in different experiences and opportunities that support their development and progress.

Children are supported with their education. All children apart from one child are in education. When children are not in education the agency advocates for appropriate learning support. As a result, one child received a package of education when they were not in school, including private tutoring. Another child moved to the school of their choice, where they are making good progress with their learning.

Children are supported to have interests and hobbies. These opportunities include dance, swimming and bike riding. Additionally, the agency supports the children to enjoy a range of experiences through participation events. Examples include the Spaghetti Club, bowling, stay and play, carers breakfast club and festivities such as Easter and Christmas celebrations. Some children were recently involved in a story writing competition and one child wrote a poem about their carers.

Children spend valued time with their birth families. Carers prioritise developing positive and meaningful relationships between children and their birth families. Carers keep family members well informed and as appropriate, share memories of children's experiences and progress. Positive adult role modelling supports children in understanding how to build relationships well.

New carers feel welcomed and supported by the agency. There is a dedicated recruitment officer who develops positive, trusted and sustained relationships with

carers throughout their journey. This includes supporting carers with a buddy during assessment and celebrating existing carers. Special touches include a framed sunflower for new carers and a monthly hero hamper for established carers.

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

Children are safe. Children are positive about their care and safety. There have been no incidents of going missing from care and there are no concerns relating to child exploitation. There has been one concern around low-level self-harm and two allegations against carers. Both were swiftly responded to, investigated and concluded appropriately. One complaint made by a child about the agency was managed appropriately.

Children have individual risk assessments and safe caring plans in place. These are reviewed and updated at least annually or when there is change or a new concern arises. Safe care plans are available in a child-friendly version and children are consulted and can complete their plans. This helps children to understand how carers keep them safe and how they can take responsibility for their safety.

The agency does not teach physical restraint to carers as the use of physical intervention is not supported. Carers are trained in therapeutic de-escalation techniques and use these well to support children's good behaviour.

Children are encouraged to take age and developmentally appropriate risk with the support of their carers and the agency. For example, children can have free time, use mobile phones and access the internet in keeping with risk assessments. A dedicated support worker carries out bespoke work with children specific to their needs, including healthy relationships and keep safe work. This support also extends to carers' birth children and has been particularly important for one child who has a specific diagnosis. The support worker also works with carers to help keep them up to date with current issues such as sexting and online safety.

Safe recruitment processes are in place for supervising social workers. However, there is a shortfall in respect of the recruitment of panel members in that gaps in employment are not always explored.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is suitably skilled and experienced. He uses his social work knowledge and previous management experience to lead the agency. He has high expectations and has been working with the advanced practitioner to ensure a child-centred and child-led approach. There has been some caution from carers and staff and feedback about the registered manager is mixed. The registered manager has been open to this feedback.

There have been staff changes. Since the last inspection, two supervising social workers have left. However, two new staff have recently been employed. These new

appointments will help to balance caseloads. New staff are appropriately recruited and trained. All staff have regular, quality supervision, annual appraisals and professional development plans. As part of their continued professional development staff have the opportunity for external and internal training.

There is a culture of learning. There is access to extensive training and a dedicated training team through the wider organisation. This means that staff and carers receive good-quality training that is constantly evolving. Virtual reality provides a simulated insight for staff and carers into children's lived experiences. This use of technology is innovative and valuable to the future of learning.

The fostering panel provides independent scrutiny of the agency's decision-making. The panel carries out thorough quality assurance of assessments. An experienced panel chair gives clear reasons for the recommendations made. The agency decision-maker is independent and is complimentary about the panel processes and the agency.

The registered manager has good monitoring systems in place. The manager uses an online survey to understand feedback from children and evaluate the progress they make.

There is good evidence of collaborative working. Professionals are complimentary of the registered manager's approach to working in partnership with others and his advocacy for children.

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 not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so, or</p> <p>allow a person to whom paragraph (2) applies, to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 1 (a)(b) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p> <p>This specifically relates to ensuring that all checks are completed for staff as directed under Schedule 1.</p>	<p>31 May 2024</p>

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation, such that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare that meets the individual needs of each fostered child and of foster carers. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', page 35, paragraph 17.5)

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: 2725635

Registered provider: The National Fostering Agency Ltd

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

Responsible individual: Jamie Moore

Registered manager: Kole Akeju

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Inspector

Stacie Sharpe, Social Care Inspector

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