

UK Fostering

UK Fostering Limited

Bridge House, High Street, Dartford, Kent DA1 1DJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency's head office is in Kent, with two additional offices located in the Midlands and the North West. At the time of this inspection, the agency provided support and supervision to 142 approved foster care households and 169 children in care. The provider states in the agency's statement of purpose that it provides emergency, short-term and long-term homes for children, and a small number of specialist provisions, including parent and child.

The registered manager has been in post since May 2012.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 November 2024

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

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

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 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive because of the exceptionally high-quality care that they receive. Foster carers demonstrate a deep commitment to improving children's outcomes and care for them with love, kindness and resilience.

Children have strong and secure attachments to their foster carers. Relationships are built on trust, empathy and a belief that children can achieve well in life. This promotes a sense of belonging for children. One child said, 'We are all part of the family, we are one.'

Disabled children flourish in the care of knowledgeable and experienced foster carers who support them to live life to the full. Children's achievements are recognised and celebrated. As a result, children's confidence and self-esteem improve significantly, and they speak proudly about their successes.

Creating stability for children is a strength and primary focus of the agency. A significant number of children remain with their foster families into adulthood. As a result of the stability of their living arrangements, children achieve well in education and have high aspirations for what they can achieve. Foster carers make the most of opportunities for children to learn independence and social skills through activities, hobbies and sports.

Foster carers and staff work extremely closely with external professionals to ensure that there is a consistent approach to care planning. Foster carers support children to attend review meetings so that their views are heard. External professionals spoken with during the inspection praised the high quality of care that children receive because of the commitment and dedication of foster carers, and the tenacious approach from staff.

Children are provided with opportunities that they describe as 'life-changing'. For example, some children were able to experience a trip to India due to collaborative working between the agency and a charity. These opportunities, and sound understanding of how to meet children's cultural needs, improve children's awareness of their own identity and teach them that diversity is celebrated.

Foster carers understand the importance of children staying in contact with their birth families. Agency staff support foster carers to achieve this. Consequently, children benefit from spending quality time with people who are important to them.

As a result of the trusting relationships that exist between children and their foster carers and agency staff, children speak openly and honestly about their wishes, feelings and ideas. The children's council is well attended and meets regularly. Therefore, children are empowered to have a say in agency decision-making.

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

Excellent safeguarding practice is evident in all areas of the agency's work. Foster carers have a sound understanding of children's strengths and vulnerabilities and support them to take age-appropriate risks. Foster carers are adept at carrying out dynamic risk assessments to ensure that children receive the supervision and support that they need.

Foster carers are well prepared and supported when accepting a new child, or parent and child, into their home. However, the matching process for one placement did not fully consider the likely impact on existing household members. This resulted in an unsettled period at the home. Managers have ensured that learning from this situation has been shared with the wider organisation to reduce the risk of a recurrence.

On the occasions when children go missing from home, foster carers and agency staff work proactively with relevant agencies to ensure their safe return at the earliest opportunity.

Meticulous oversight by the designated safeguarding leads and the registered manager means that allegations against foster carers are managed safely and in a timely way. Recording is thorough and learning is shared via team meetings, learning reviews and training.

Supervising social workers complete unannounced visits to ensure that children live in a safe environment. Regular and well-planned supervision and well-attended support groups offer foster carers a platform in which to share experiences, learn and reflect. As a result, early indicators of placement disruption are identified and swiftly addressed.

Staff and foster carers have completed all the training that the agency makes mandatory. In addition, bespoke training is facilitated by the agency to support foster carers to meet the individual needs of children. Knowledge and learning are embedded into practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A key strength of the agency is the committed and determined leadership team that works tirelessly to continually improve the agency. The responsible individual and, particularly, the registered manager are the driving force of the agency. Their vision to improve children's life chances is shared across the workforce. They ensure that long-term goals remain achievable as the agency grows.

The agency staff are dedicated and conscientious, and they have high aspirations that children can achieve their goals. Staff told inspectors that they are valued and

fully supported and that their well-being is prioritised by leaders. This enables them to remain committed to ensuring that children receive high-quality care.

The management's monitoring and oversight of the service are highly effective. Annual consultations with children, foster carers and stakeholders inform plans to further improve the service.

Quality assurance processes are comprehensive and provide leaders with a clear understanding of the impact that the service is having on outcomes for children. Identified shortfalls are addressed without delay.

All staff receive high-quality practice-related supervision. Discussions are linked to children's records and agreed actions are completed without drift and delay. Progress evaluations provide opportunities for staff's development and promotion within the agency.

New staff receive a thorough and supportive induction. As a result, staff are knowledgeable and have the skills that they need to meet the needs of children and support foster carers who have wide-ranging skills and experience.

The fostering panel consists of appropriately qualified and experienced members. All panel members have received an annual appraisal and completed mandatory training. Thorough preparation provides panel members with the information that they need to make safe recommendations.

The agency decision-maker provides clarity and scrutiny to decision-making. Timely, well-informed and appropriate recommendations are in line with the overriding objective to improve outcomes for children in the agency's care.

The registered manager completes their own quality of care review in collaboration with other senior leaders. This promotes learning and development for the whole team.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.1)

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: SC448220

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