

Child Care Bureau Fostering Services

Child Care Bureau Limited

First Floor, Unit 11–13, Elgar Business Centre, Moseley Road, Worcestershire
WR2 6NJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This fostering agency was registered in 2004. In June 2018, the agency became part of a large, privately owned national organisation.

The fostering agency offers a wide range of placements, including emergency, respite, short- and long-term, bridging, parent and child, unaccompanied children and young people and young adults 'staying put'. At the time of the inspection, there were 67 children living in 39 fostering households across 17 local authority regions.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2015. He holds a suitable management qualification.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 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	requires improvement to be good

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

Date of last inspection: 11 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children are well supported to have positive experiences and to achieve improved outcomes.
- Children, foster carers and professionals are overwhelmingly positive about the agency and the support that it provides.
- Children are supported to achieve educationally and to be aspirational for their futures.
- Children feel part of their foster families and are fully involved in all aspects of family life.
- Foster carers provide individualised care to children.
- Incidents of children going missing from foster homes are low.
- The agency is improving the involvement of children and foster carers in the agency.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- There are gaps in management oversight of the agency, which have led to inconsistent practice. This includes shortfalls in fostering panel practice, management of post-allegation reviews, matching, staff recruitment and training, foster carer training and record-keeping. The organisation has recognised these shortfalls and has plans to address them.

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, 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 registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on and manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>This is in relation to:</p> <p>placement matching and ensuring that matching decisions take account of the needs of any child already living in the household when considering whether to place a child;</p> <p>ensuring that foster carers complete the core training as required by the agency; and</p> <p>ensuring that the fostering panel consistently provides the required levels of oversight and challenge for the approval process, that the agency decision maker is a consistent individual with the required level of experience and standing, and that quality assurance reporting received from panel is used to improve practice within the organisation.</p>	21/12/2018
<p>The fostering agency must prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse and neglect and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse and neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b)(3)(e))</p>	21/12/2018

<p>This is in relation to the completion of comprehensive post-allegation reviews, which include the voice of the child and which consider the competence of foster carers. These reports should be considered by the agency fostering panel.</p>	
<p>The fostering service must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so. For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a)(3))</p>	<p>21/12/2018</p>
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation 21 (4))</p>	<p>21/12/2018</p>

Recommendations

- Ensure that where a child requires it, the children's guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, eg Makaton, pictures, tape recording and translation into another language. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 33, paragraph 16.6)

This is in relation to ensuring that the children's guide is produced in a format that is accessible for younger children.

- Ensure that staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and action taken when needed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 52, paragraph 26.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive good-quality care from highly motivated foster carers who understand the child's individual needs. A social worker told an inspector that foster carers, 'Have an excellent understanding of (child's) needs and support him unconditionally. They are totally committed to caring for him. It is clear he is safe and happy at home.'

Children and foster carers are overwhelmingly positive about the support and supervision that they receive from the agency. One foster carer told an inspector that, 'They know who you are and know about you. They are responsive to you as an individual carer and to the individual child. In difficult times, they remain calm.' This support helps foster carers to focus on improving children's experiences.

The agency is in the process of introducing a therapeutic parenting model. While this is yet to be fully embedded, foster carers are benefiting from therapeutic support through group and individual sessions. One foster carer told the inspectors that this input had helped with placement stability as it, 'Helped me think about things in a different way.'

Education is a strength for this agency, with all children attending education at the time of the inspection. The agency values education and actively supports foster carers to ensure that children achieve the best possible outcomes. For example, a supervising social worker accompanied foster carers visiting specialist schools, helping them to identify which one would best meet the needs of the child. Children are aspirational about their futures and progress to apprenticeships and college placements.

Foster carers ensure that all children are registered with health services. Where specialist services are required, foster carers work closely with wider health professionals to ensure that foster carers understand and respond to the child's needs effectively. For example, a foster carer's tenacity in requesting a health assessment for a child has resulted in the child receiving treatment for previously undiagnosed health needs.

Children experience a wide range of leisure and social activities with foster carers, which encourage children's self-esteem and ensure that children feel part of the family. Children participate in abseiling, canoeing, football, cricket, cookery courses, soft-play activities, family celebrations and holidays. A child told the inspectors, 'I love living with my carers because I feel a part of the family and not like an outcast.'

Foster carers help children to achieve the skills that they will need in adulthood. The agency has five young adults who have remained 'staying put' with their foster carers and it is planned that this figure will further increase.

Children are supported to maintain links with family and friends who are important

to them. One foster carer has been instrumental in supporting a plan for children to return to live with their family, regularly going to the family home to support the parent. By going over and above, this foster carer has enabled a smooth, well-planned move for these children.

Since the last inspection, the agency has taken steps to improve the involvement of foster carers and children with the agency. There has been an increase in social events for foster carers and children. In addition, children have been asked to devise questions that the agency fostering panel can ask applicants. These questions are due to be used for the first time at the November 2018 fostering panel.

The agency's children's guide is offered in two age-related formats. The version for older children is a nicely presented informative document. However, the guide for younger children does not reflect their age and understanding. The manager has identified this issue and is planning to update the guides in consultation with children.

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

Foster carers understand their roles in safeguarding the children in their care and are quick to identify areas of concern. For example, the observations by one foster carer highlighted a significant issue for two children. The social worker told the inspector that the recordings made by the foster carer evidenced a clear ability to record and report concerns in a timely manner.

Incidents where children go missing from their foster home are low. Each child has an individual going missing protocol in place and if children do go missing from home, foster carers have a very clear understanding about what they need to do. Children who have been missing from home are given the opportunity to speak to an independent person when they return.

Supervising social workers complete detailed risk assessments that help foster carers to understand, and manage, any risks that individual children are subject to. The agency is currently implementing individual safer caring plans for all children that will further help foster carers and children to understand their care. However, when matching children with foster carers, supervising social workers do not consider the needs of children already living in the household. For example, when matching a child who was considered at risk of child sexual exploitation, no reference was made to a child with a similar risk profile already living in the home. This does not promote the safeguarding of children.

When a foster carer has been subject to an allegation, the agency responds quickly, ensuring that timely notification is made to relevant statutory bodies. Foster carers have access to independent support when they are subject to an allegation and foster carers spoke positively about the support that they have received in these circumstances. However, managers do not ensure that post-allegation processes are sufficiently thorough. For example, investigations failed to identify patterns in allegations and there was an over-reliance on foster carers' views and experiences. This lack of rigour fails to ensure that both foster carers and the agency are

accountable for their actions and that learning from allegations is used to improve practice.

Foster carers provide children with safe home environments. These are monitored by supervising social workers, who complete annual health and safety inspections and two unannounced visits to the foster carer's home each year.

Managers have not had sufficient oversight of staff recruitment. For example, gaps in employment are not always verified and the required number of references are not consistently taken. This means that managers do not know that people employed by the agency are safe to work with children.

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

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 2015. He is highly valued by foster carers and by staff across the organisation.

During the inspection, the inspectors found a number of shortfalls in management oversight of the agency. Managers accepted all of the inspectors' findings during the inspection and have been quick to devise action plans to support improvement. The recent acquisition of the agency by a national provider will support these plans by strengthening management systems and improving oversight.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision and told inspectors that this supports their practice. Not all supervising social workers have had access to training that supports their roles. For example, no supervising social workers have attended training in providing supervision to foster carers or managing allegations. This leaves supervising social workers without the underpinning knowledge and skills to support this specialist role.

Managers ensure that foster carers have access to a wide range of training opportunities. Foster carers told inspectors that their training supports them in their fostering roles. However, managers have not made sure that foster carers complete and refresh their mandatory training in a timely way. For example, 21% of primary foster carers are without a current safer caring certificate and five fostering households have no foster carer with current safer caring training. Two fostering households are without a foster carer with a current first aid certificate. These omissions mean that foster carers are without the essential training required to enable them to care for children safely.

The agency arrangements for a fostering panel have not consistently offered the level of oversight and challenge that is required for an effective approvals process. This includes failures by the fostering panel to address issues of suitability where there has been a safeguarding concern or to consider the impact of weaknesses in the application when making recommendations. These lapses have not subsequently been identified by the agency decision maker. The agency has not benefited from a consistent agency decision maker of sufficient seniority within the organisation. Opportunities to improve practice in relation to the fostering panel have been

missed. The quality assurance feedback to, and from, panel members is not routinely used to inform development and panel members have not had the opportunity to attend training with agency staff.

Managers have not ensured that staff maintain timely and accurate records in line with organisational policy. For example, some foster carers have experienced three months' delay in receiving records of supervision. This means that staff and foster carers are without clear, up-to-date records in the case of a complaint or allegation.

The agency has a high number of foster carers who are providing long-term placements for children. In contrast, the agency has also experienced a number of placements that have ended unexpectedly. Despite this developing pattern, managers have failed to undertake a review of this area to help them understand the trends or how they can improve placement stability.

The manager has developed good-quality relationships with wider professional networks. Placing social workers told inspectors that supervising social workers work closely with them, ensuring that placing social workers are kept updated about their child and the placement.

Since the last inspection, there have been four complaints made to the agency. These have been well managed and demonstrate the willingness of the manager to be accountable when practice shortfalls arise.

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: SC034788

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Inspectors

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