

National Fostering Agency London North

The National Fostering Agency Limited

Waterside House, 20 Riverside Way, Uxbridge UB8 2YF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency registered in June 2022. It is based in the London Borough of Hillingdon and operates mainly in North London. The agency provides a full range of fostering placements to children, including emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, there were 123 fostering households, comprising 211 foster carers. The fostering agency has 153 children living with foster carers.

The post for a registered manager has been vacant since March 2023. The new manager is currently in the process of registering with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 February 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: 28 November 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Foster carers provide children with good-quality care that is individualised to meet their specific needs. Children develop positive and trusting relationships with their foster carers, who provide children with stability and security. Consequently, many children remain with their foster carers for a long time and experience a sense of permanency.

Leaders and managers offer a specialist intervention and assessment service for children who experience complex social and emotional difficulties. Foster carers receive additional training to meet the needs of such children as part of this service. This intervention contributes significantly to the stability of foster children living in foster care. Leaders and managers respond quickly when placements are unstable and take appropriate steps to review placements with the responsible authorities. This ensures that the right level of support is identified for children and foster carers.

Foster carers, managers and staff are strong advocates for children. They support children to make good progress in many aspects of their lives, including their health, education and independence skills. Foster carers, managers and staff recognise children's achievements at the agency's annual awards ceremony and through the giving of individual certificates throughout the year.

Managers and staff provide opportunities for children to express their wishes and feelings. They organise regular activities for children, such as a recent bowling event. A survey carried out by the agency shows that children feel listened to by those caring for them and that they are positive about their futures. The children's guide is also available in several languages to ensure that all children can understand it.

Foster carers provide children with opportunities to participate in leisure and social activities of their choice. Children enjoy horse riding, going to sea cadets, playing football and travelling abroad with their foster carers. As a result, children develop confidence in their social and physical abilities, which increases their self-esteem.

Arrangements for 'staying put' are positively promoted by managers and staff where this is in the best interests of older children. One child spoken to by inspectors expressed their need for stability at this crucial time as they wished to complete their studies. The child was aware that their foster carer, social worker and the fostering agency were working to ensure that things 'remained the same' after they turned 18.

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

Children say that they feel safe with their foster carers and that they have someone they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Managers, staff and foster carers are proactive and can identify risks for children. They use effective strategies to minimise harm and work collaboratively with external agencies.

Leaders and managers meet regularly to monitor the plans for children where risks have been identified. Safety plans for children are reviewed by foster carers and staff when new risks are identified. Foster carers help children to understand the possible risks posed to them with activities such as online gaming and social media. Incidents of children experiencing or being exposed to risk have reduced.

Risk assessments have not been consistently carried out when there have been changes in fostering households. In two households, one of the foster carers left the home for a significant period and the families were not reassessed as single carers. In another household, a new adult moved into the home and checks were not carried out in a timely way.

Foster carers receive appropriate training in managing children's behaviour. This includes de-escalation techniques as well as safeguarding. Foster carers help children to communicate their feelings in positive ways. One child has been supported to use a 'feelings clock' to express their emotions to their foster carers. This has helped to reduce the number of incidents in the home.

Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment procedures when employing staff for the fostering agency. This ensures that only suitably vetted staff work with vulnerable children. Staff say that they had a good induction to the fostering agency, which covered areas such as safeguarding.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leadership and management of the agency have strengthened. Two new team leaders have been appointed alongside a new manager and responsible individual. Several new social work staff have also been recruited. Foster carers and staff say that the new leadership team has provided stability during a previously unsettled period for the agency. There is a clear ethos promoted by leaders and managers of building positive relationships and maintaining a focus on children.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a strong motivation to maintain the standards expected of a fostering agency and improve on them wherever possible. Leaders and managers value the feedback received from children and foster carers to inform the service. Leaders and managers endeavour to ensure that communication remains open. They are accessible and visible to staff, foster carers and children. The requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have been met.

Leaders and managers have made progress in addressing shortfalls; however, monitoring requires further development. Children's case files do not contain information from placing authorities, such as their care plans and education, health and care plans. Leaders and managers do not consistently follow up with local authorities to obtain them or evidence that these documents have been requested. Although not widespread, leaders and managers have not monitored staff's adherence effectively to the agency's policy for supervisory visits to foster carers. Foster carer logs vary in quality and do not always reflect the day-to-day lives and experiences of children.

Staff say that they receive good support from leaders and managers. Managers appropriately supervise staff. Team meetings provide opportunities for staff to develop their skills and discuss practice issues. Staff speak positively about the training opportunities offered by leaders and managers. Leaders and managers also offer staff opportunities to progress in the organisation. For example, some staff are being supported to undertake a professional qualification in social work.

Foster carers say that staff and managers support them effectively. Prospective foster carers report being welcomed warmly by staff, leaders and managers. Foster carers are happy with the quality and variety of training provided by the fostering agency. Although leaders and managers have made progress to address the compliance for foster carers to complete training, not all carers have completed mandatory training.

The fostering panel acts as an effective quality assurance mechanism for the agency. Fostering panel members have a range of experiences and professional backgrounds. The agency decision-maker and fostering panel chair are very experienced childcare practitioners. They challenge the agency when necessary and have regular meetings with leaders and managers to discuss how the agency and the fostering panel work together. The fostering panel chair described foster carers in the agency as 'inspiring' in terms of the resilience they show during challenging situations.

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 registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))</p> <p>This specifically relates to assessing the impact and risk to children when significant changes occur in the foster home, such as new adults joining the household or foster carers not being present in the foster home for significant periods.</p>	<p>1 May 2024</p>

Recommendations

- The registered person should 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, including the completion of mandatory training. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 40, paragraph 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that they regularly monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies in respect of visits to foster carers. Immediate action should be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that fostering households understand the importance and nature of records and follow the service's policy. There should be a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and foster carer logs so that action can be taken to address any shortfalls identified. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 52, paragraph 26.2)
- The registered person should ensure that where there is an agency placement, the agency works with the responsible authority to ensure effective integration of information held in the agency's case files and those of the responsible authority. This includes details of children's looked after reviews, care plans and education, health and care plans. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', page 53, paragraph 26.8)

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: 2677721

Registered provider: The National Fostering Agency Limited

Registered provider address: The National Fostering Group, Atria, Spa Road,
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Responsible individual: Lynn Webb

Registered manager: Post vacant

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Inspectors

Colin Bent, Social Care Inspector
Aneta Wasilewska, Social Care Inspector
Melvin Davies, Social Care Inspector

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