

North West Fostering

Action for Children

Unit 15, 6th Floor St James House, Pendleton Way, Salford M6 5FW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

North West fostering is an independent fostering agency run by a well-established children's charity. The agency provides long-term and short-term therapeutic foster placements. The agency also provides a therapeutic support service to children not placed with the agency. This service was not included as part of the inspection.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had three approved fostering households with three children in placement.

The manager was registered with Ofsted in May 2020.

Inspection dates: 13 to 17 June 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 10 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from highly nurturing, child-centred, therapeutic foster care that is tailored to meet their individual needs. Children say they are happy and like living with their foster carers. The majority of children make good progress in all areas of their lives.

Staff, foster carers and children know each other well and feel connected to the agency. Access to opportunities across the wider organisation, including training and participation events, means they also benefit from being part of a larger fostering network.

Carers are highly positive about the support they receive. Since the last inspection, the agency has embedded a new therapeutic model of care. The clinical psychology service provides ongoing training and support to carers and agency staff enabling them to create nurturing, therapeutic environments for children. Along with other key professionals involved in the child's care, they develop clear therapeutic plans to identify and support children's emotional and developmental needs. These plans are regularly reviewed and updated.

Children are welcomed into their foster families. The introduction of a digital welcome pack means children and key professionals are able to develop a sense of the carers before meeting them. This helps to make transitions easier for children.

Matching processes are robust. The agency carefully matches children with foster carers who can meet their needs. Introductions are well planned, with oversight from the registered manager and clinical psychologist as required. Children rarely experience unplanned placement endings. When they do, this is usually due to a change in carer circumstances. There is a multi-agency approach to supporting children to experience positive transitions into and out of their foster families.

Children's participation is a key strength in the agency. Children are supported to engage in opportunities to develop practice across the agency and wider organisation. One child has won a national award in recognition of her ongoing work to ensure children's voices are heard.

Children's identities are well promoted. Children's interests are encouraged, and they have opportunities to enjoy a range of new experiences, including holidays, leisure activities and participation events. Children are also helped to safely keep in touch with people who are important to them. This helps children to positively widen their social networks and further develop their sense of belonging and identity.

The agency is proactive in advocating on behalf of children. Staff communicate effectively with key partners to ensure children's needs are being met. Education is supported. All children living with the agency's foster carers make some progress in education from their individual starting points.

Children say they are listened to. All children receive a children's guide that is in a suitable format for the children currently living with the agency's foster carers. It is under review to ensure it is suitable for all age groups. The guide does not include the details of the Children's Commissioner for England. This is a missed opportunity to ensure children have information about this useful resource for support.

Foster carer records are child-focused but carers do not routinely involve children in their records. This limits children's opportunities to share their views and to reflect on their experiences with their foster carers.

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

Children say they feel safe living with their foster carers. Social workers are positive about the care children receive and the progress they make. One social worker said, 'I am very impressed with them. [Name of child] has never been in such a good place and I've never seen my child so happy. They are very in tune with the child's emotional well-being and keep us updated. They have given the child a real sense of belonging.'

Challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been well managed. The agency continued to provide high levels of support to children and carers. They creatively used online activities to maintain contact and engage children during times of local and national restrictions.

Robust risk management plans identify risks and strategies for carers to follow to keep children safe. Through direct-work sessions with agency staff, children are supported to develop their emotional regulation skills. They are encouraged to engage in age-appropriate discussions about risk, and from these discussions are supported to develop their own safety plans. This helps to increase children's understanding of risk and supports them to make safer choices. As a result, there are a low number of incidents and children rarely go missing from their foster families. When incidents do occur, foster carers know how to respond. The manager has strong oversight of all incidents. Any concerns are appropriately shared with relevant professionals and notified to Ofsted as required by regulation.

Carers know how to respond to children. The manager has oversight of all behaviour management strategies used in foster families. The focus is on providing natural consequences and positive reinforcement to children. When sanctions are used, they are restorative and help children to reflect and learn from their behaviours. There have not been any incidents of carers having to hold children to keep them safe.

A shortfall in the assessment and approval process was identified during the inspection. Opportunities to fully explore key information during an assessment had been missed. It had also not been included in the written report, meaning it was not considered as part of the approval process. The agency's internal quality assurance processes had not identified this shortfall.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency has undergone significant changes since the last inspection. There have been a number of staffing changes and a new manager has been appointed. She is suitably qualified and experienced. The team benefits from her clear leadership and guidance. The manager uses effective monitoring systems to ensure she has robust oversight of the service and fostering business. She is committed to improving outcomes for children.

Despite ongoing recruitment initiatives, there has been a reduction in the number of approved foster carers. This is predominately due to changes in carer circumstances but limits the number of children the agency can support. The wider organisation is committed to the ongoing development of the agency. A clear development plan and recruitment strategy are in place to address the current and predicted demands on the agency. Recruitment activity is ongoing.

The recent transition to a shared panel was well planned. Members of the central list have a wide range of experiences relevant to fostering but membership is limited and does not provide a gender balance or reflect the diversity of the local community. This is something that is currently being addressed. Minutes of panel meetings are detailed and reflect a clear rationale for recommendations and decision-making. The panel chair did not receive their appraisal as required. This reduces opportunities for reflection and learning.

Staff and foster carers benefit from thorough induction processes. They have access to a wide range of training opportunities and feel this helps them to further develop in their roles. Staff and carer supervisions take place in line with the agency's policies. The agency's electronic recording systems are well maintained and clearly demonstrate the journey for children and foster carers.

The agency's statement of purpose does not include all services offered by the agency and does not reflect the current fostering panel arrangements.

Two requirements and one recommendation set at the last inspection have been met. One recommendation in relation to carer recruitment has been restated.

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
The fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service ("the statement of purpose") which consists of— a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service. (Regulation 3 (1)(b)) This specifically relates to ensuring that the statement of purpose includes information about the current fostering panel arrangements and all services provided by the agency.	12 August 2022
Where a person ("X") applies to become a foster parent and the fostering service provider decide to assess X's suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation. Subject to paragraphs (2A) and (3), where the fostering service provider have obtained all the information set out in paragraph (1A) and have not given the notification in paragraph (1B) within 10 working days of doing so, the fostering service provider must subject to paragraph (3)— obtain the information specified in Part 2 of Schedule 3 relating to X and other members of X's household and any other information they consider relevant, prepare a written report on X which includes the following matters— the information required by Schedule 3 and any other information the fostering service provider consider relevant, (Regulation 26 (1) (2)(a)(c)(i))	12 August 2022

In particular, that there are efficient and robust quality assurance processes in place to ensure that key information is fully considered and is not omitted from written reports.	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should aim to recruit sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 13.1) This recommendation is restated.
- The registered person should ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. ('Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', section 5.15)
- The registered person should ensure that, as far as is practicable, panel membership reflects the issues under consideration and should, as appropriate, be gender balanced and reflect the diversity of the local community. ('Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4', section 5.8)
- The registered person should ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that the children's guide informs children how they can contact the Children's Commissioner for England. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 16.4)

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: 1226858

Registered provider: Action for Children

Registered provider address: Action for Children, 3 The Boulevard, Ascot Road, Watford WD18 8AG

Responsible individual: Colette Ferns

Registered manager: Adrienne Cronin

Telephone number: 01617078508

Email address: fostering@actionforchildren.org.uk

Inspector

Caroline Bertram, Social Care Inspector

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