

Mulberry Foster Care Ltd

Mulberry Foster Care Ltd

Orchard House, Phocle Green Business Park, Ross-On-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 7XU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private company runs this fostering agency. There is a permanent registered manager in post. They are suitably qualified and experienced.

The fostering agency provides emergency, respite, short-term, long-term and parent and child foster placements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 31 approved fostering households and 47 children placed with its foster carers.

Inspection dates: 10 to 14 November 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 26 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The agency has a beautiful suite of buildings, providing excellent facilities for staff, carers and children. It has a purpose-built therapy suite on site, including an exceptionally high-quality sensory room. The setting has a library for children, with books centred around emotions and managing transitions. Children's artwork is displayed around the building, and one child has painted a portrait of the office dog, which is proudly displayed. The setting is very welcoming; many of the children and carers are familiar with the building and all the staff, so they are very comfortable spending time there.

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points because of the nurturing and consistent care they receive from their foster carers. For example, children with complex needs have made significant and sustained improvement in meeting speech and mobility milestones. Foster carers are diligent in understanding children's health and developmental needs. One child has made life-changing improvement in their overall health, from a very fragile starting point. Other children have made vast progress with their emotional well-being. This is because of the high-quality care they receive.

The agency staff understand children's health needs and ensure that carers have the knowledge and skills to meet these. Staff have innovative ideas to support carers to sustain high-quality care. For example, one staff member has devised a health document detailing key information regarding a child's complex health. The foster carer shares this at all hospital visits to convey this essential information with ease and accuracy.

Agency staff are proactive in addressing any barriers to children's education, for example acting when a change of school is in the child's best interest. Children are helped with transitions to further education; this helps children pursue their interests and talents. For example, one child is studying art at college, which is a real dream for them.

Children have lovely relationships with their foster carers because of the nurture they receive. For example, one child has written songs expressing their love and gratitude for their foster family, with truly heartwarming lyrics. Since living with their foster carers, the child has made vast progress with expressing their emotions in a positive way. Foster carers speak fondly about the children in their care and demonstrate a high commitment to them. Some foster carers say that children have a home for life with them.

Leaders have fully embedded a therapeutic ethos and culture in the agency. The whole staff team understands the research-based therapeutic approach, and this is a tangible thread throughout the practice of the agency. The agency removes barriers

to therapeutic support for children by directly funding and arranging interventions. These include play therapy, mentoring, creative counselling and systemic consultations. There are a wealth of examples of how the therapeutic approaches and input have directly supported children's outcomes and contributed to placement stability, and, in addition, carer well-being.

One foster carer said, 'The therapeutic support gives us optimism for the children in our care to have necessary therapy for their trauma.' Mentoring has had a demonstrable impact on a child's confidence, relationships and outlook. Music therapy has significantly enhanced another child's communication, emotional regulation and attachment security. Equine therapy has had a tangible impact on one child's emotional well-being, self-esteem and capacity to self-regulate. It has also supported their physical development. Due to a change in commissioning arrangements, all children now have equal access to therapeutic interventions.

Consultation with children is very strong and leaders are constantly striving to ensure that this is entirely meaningful. There are a vast array of creative initiatives that enable children of all ages to be involved, for example the children's council, which the children have recently renamed 'fostering friends'. This group has redesigned the children's guide. Children are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and events with the agency. This includes days out, competitions, interviewing applicant carers and craft workshops. This results in a real sense of community and belonging.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities with their foster carers, for example holidays, Cadets and sport clubs. One foster carer told the inspector they were so very proud to see the child take part in the recent Remembrance Parade in their Cadet uniform, and how respectful they were in doing this.

The agency celebrates children's progress and achievements, for example through the 'nominate a miniature hero' scheme to recognise children's areas of progress. Children receive a certificate for this success from the agency. Furthermore, when children move in with their foster carer, the agency provides them with a memory box containing items of interest. Carers then add to the memory boxes memorabilia from events and activities children have enjoyed. This helps children to have a living record of their lives. Children's records do not detail the day they move on from foster care; this is a missed opportunity to reflect this part of the children's journey.

Foster carers say that their involvement with the agency is exceptional right from the start, through the assessment process and preparation for their role. Feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Applicants and new carers have access to a buddy system, so that they can gain support and knowledge from more experienced foster carers. Assessments are carried out with diligence and sensitivity.

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

Agency staff and foster carers have a comprehensive understanding of children's risks and vulnerabilities. While agency staff understand and respect the roles of partner agencies, they are incredibly child focused and intervene to ensure a timely response to emerging risks. As a result of the swift and substantial support from agency staff, foster carers are well equipped to manage risk, and this contributes to safety and placement stability for children.

The agency has forged strong links with partner agencies, including children's placing authorities, to respond to risks of harm effectively. Agency staff are diligent in sharing information and concerns with relevant agencies. Professionals say that communication from agency staff is exceptional. They highlight that the proactive involvement of the agency in supporting its foster carers enables them to go above and beyond to meet children's needs.

There have been no incidents of children going missing because children feel safe and have a high sense of belonging in their foster homes. This risk is well considered in children's risk assessments, and this provides foster carers with clear guidance of what action to take.

Management of behaviour is rooted in the therapeutic approaches of the agency. The enhanced and specialist training agency staff and foster carers receive means that they understand children's behaviour and address it in a relational and therapeutic way. As a result, children trust the adults caring for them, and they share their worries and previous experiences.

Agency staff work directly with children and listen to their ideas for their safety planning. For example, in managing the risk of self-harm, a supervising social worker initially sought advice from the agency's therapeutic lead and then spoke with the child to develop the plan. A key part of this plan was for the child to begin mentoring support; this commenced without delay and has improved the child's well-being.

All foster homes have an annual health and safety assessment and an unannounced visit at least once a year. For increased diligence and objectivity, these visits are now conducted by an alternative supervising social worker. The agency ensures that children with additional vulnerabilities have their environment modified for their safety. This includes following advice from professionals, including health visitors and occupational therapists.

Recruitment of foster carers is thorough. This ensures that they are entirely suitable to care for children. Initial foster carer training embeds a real focus on safeguarding; this remains a priority through ongoing support and development. There has been one deregistration. The agency takes this step very seriously, with a robustness in their approach, giving due diligence to all processes. The protection and well-being of children remain central in all functions of the agency.

The agency notifies the regulator of serious incidents, although this is not consistently done in a timely way.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager and the responsible individual are directors of the organisation. They are inspirational leaders who consistently model the therapeutic ethos of the agency. Leaders and managers set clear expectations for foster carers to provide high-quality therapeutic care to children, and they are aspirational for the progress they can make.

The manager and the responsible individual have diligent oversight of the agency. There has been significant development of key roles within the leadership and management team. This supports organisational structure effectively, including commissioning, recruitment and retention. The manager leads the agency from a child-centred social work value base first and foremost but balances it well with the business functionality.

There has been change and growth in respect of the agency staff team. There is a full staff team, whose members bring a wealth of skills and experience. The agency is investing heavily in staff development, with several supervising social workers completing qualifications to become systemic practitioners. This significantly enhances staff expertise.

All staff work full time, in the office base, so there is constant access to support and reflections with peers and managers. This contributes to staff's development and resilience. Furthermore, the staff team is fully available and accessible to support children and foster carers. Staff are highly attentive and responsive to foster carers and children and envelop them in an exceptional level of support. One foster carer described their supervising social worker as 'amazing, always on hand 24/7 with advice, help and support nothing is ever a problem or too much trouble, we couldn't do this without her and the team'.

Leaders and managers are innovative in the development of the agency. For example, while respite care is not routinely provided, the agency has developed a service called 'helping hands'. The aim of this is to offer practical support and short breaks only, where appropriate for the child. This is supportive of carer well-being while keeping the child at the centre and promotes placement stability.

There are a wealth of opportunities for children and foster carers to participate in the agency. For example, the foster carer ambassadors forum is effective in sharing its views and influencing the development of the agency. The agency operates a 'bring and borrow scheme' to help foster carers access items they need for children, and this helps with the financial demands of this. There is a wide range of events and activities arranged by the agency. Highlights include a Christmas market, yoga, summer trips, chocolate making and coffee mornings. These opportunities create a real sense of community and belonging, and carers feel highly valued by the agency.

The agency's panel is exceptionally well organised and operated. There are clear and dedicated roles, fulfilled by skilled and experienced practitioners. The panel chair has excellent oversight of panel members and functions. Action has been taken to enhance the diversity of panel membership.

As the agency has experienced growth, leaders and managers have sustained an unwavering commitment to sustain a high quality of care for children. This has been achieved, and growth has enhanced the support and services for foster carers and children. As a result, children living with their foster carers thrive.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. This includes records detailing children's moves out of foster homes. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)
- The registered person should ensure that there is a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 29.1)

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: 1236131

Registered provider: Mulberry Foster Care Ltd

Registered provider address: Orchard House, Phocle Green Business Park, Ross-On-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 7XU

Responsible individual: Andrew Robinson

Registered manager: Shaun Burnett

Telephone number: 01432 371 971

Inspector

Alison Snell, Social Care Inspector

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