

Oak Fostering Ltd

Oak Fostering Limited

12 Dunstable Street, The Limes, Ampthill, Bedfordshire MK45 2GJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency registered in 2017 and is owned by a small private company. The agency provides respite, short-term and long-term placements with a focus on offering children permanency and the opportunity to experience foster care. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 11 approved fostering households and was providing care to 8 children.

The manager registered with Ofsted on 11 November 2022

Inspection dates: 9 to 12 March 2026

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

Date of last inspection: 9 January 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children experience consistently good quality care. Foster carers provide warm, nurturing homes where children feel valued and included. Children enjoy a range of activities, events and social opportunities, and describe feeling like members of their foster family. They are involved in day-to-day family routines, celebrations, and holidays which includes overseas travel for some children.

The agency's intention is to offer long-term, therapeutic foster care. While only three children are currently in long-term placements, all children are settled and secure with their foster carers. Since the last inspection, two children achieved permanence through adoption or special guardianship with their carers. Two placements ended in an unplanned way. Other children moved on in a planned way with close coordination between the agency and local authorities, with several children moving on to residential care.

Children's views are actively and regularly sought. The agency uses child-friendly tools during reviews, direct work sessions and daily records, and children receive feedback creatively in age-appropriate ways they can understand. The children's guide is accessible and well designed.

Education is prioritised. All children are in school, and school places are arranged quickly when a child moves to a new placement. Staff advocate effectively for children with additional needs and have funded private assessments to ensure children receive timely support. Good collaborative working between carers, schools and supervising social workers promotes educational outcomes.

Children's health needs are well met. They are registered with required health services and supported to attend appointments. Emotional wellbeing is supported through the agency's therapeutic lead or commissioned therapeutic services when necessary. This flexible and responsive approach is valued by carers.

Children's achievements and milestones such as birthdays are celebrated through tokens and vouchers, which promote children's self-esteem and sense of identity. The agency organises activities which children enjoy, and inclusion of carers' own children strengthens family cohesion and supports shared positive experiences.

Foster carers support children's relationships with their birth families well. They support contact arrangements in line with children's plans and understand the importance of maintaining meaningful connections where appropriate.

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

Children are kept safe by carers who understand their individual needs and vulnerabilities well. Agency care plans are clear, detailed and show a genuine understanding of each child. These are supported by therapeutic care plans and comprehensive risk assessments, which identify risks and strategies to reduce them.

Placement planning has improved since the last inspection. Matching processes are thorough, well considered and involve carers at every stage. Children benefit from carefully planned introductions and transitions, which help them to settle quickly and feel secure.

The agency's approach to respite is a notable strength. Every child has a designated "weekend carer" whom they visit regularly, typically monthly, who provides this support from when children are placed. This gives carers predictable support and creates an extended-family model for children that offers stability and familiarity.

A therapeutic model of care is embedded across the agency. The manager and psychotherapist have driven this approach, and carers and staff demonstrate good understanding and commitment to enhancing therapeutic practice. Evidence of reflective practice is seen in supervisions, training records and direct work.

Incidents within the agency are exceptionally low. Since the last inspection there has been only one recorded restraint and only one child has been missing from home. When incidents do occur, records are detailed, reflective and show managerial oversight. While risks such as exploitation or criminal activity are not currently present, staff and carers maintain awareness and receive appropriate training to respond effectively should concerns arise.

The agency provides excellent wrap-around support. Outreach workers offer additional help when needed, and carers report that out-of-hours support is available and helpful, and on occasion, staff visit in person to provide practical assistance.

Foster carers conduct themselves professionally. Only one concern has been raised since the previous inspection and was investigated robustly under standards of care procedures. Although the carer involved felt unsupported during the process, the agency maintained stringent safeguarding protocols and referred the matter to panel.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leadership and management are highly effective. The manager in particular is experienced, passionate and ambitious for children. They have maintained high quality practice across the service since the last inspection and demonstrate a clear vision for the agency. This ethos is embedded across the staff team and carers.

The agency benefits from a stable and highly committed workforce. Staff and carers consistently describe the agency as feeling like a "family" and identify this culture as

a core strength. Staff are supported and encouraged to think about creative approaches to problems when they arise across the team.

Recruitment and assessment of new carers is robust. Form F assessments are detailed, benefit from excellent quality assurance which incorporates professional insight from the psychotherapist. A remote fostering panel provides rigorous scrutiny and makes well-evidenced recommendations. The panel chair and agency decision maker are highly experienced, and decisions are timely and sound. Recruitment practices for staff and panel members are also robust and follow safer recruitment requirements.

Supervising social workers have exceptionally low caseloads. This enables them to develop deep relationships with carers, understand children's needs well, and provide a high level of support that exceeds what is typically seen in many agencies. Supervision for both staff and carers is regular, reflective and detailed. Carers consistently praise the quality of support they receive, and staff describe feeling very well supported by the manager.

Training for carers and staff is strong. The programme is varied, responsive to emerging needs, and includes bespoke sessions such as home-based physical intervention training that was arranged for one carer. The agency provides a range of formal supports such as a wellbeing budget, and carer 'business lunches', which are valued by carers. An annual conference also shares and promotes good practice both across the service and within the wider local and professional community.

The agency demonstrates emphasis on supporting equality, diversity and inclusion. A supervising social worker has championed improved practice in supporting children's cultural identity. The agency's links with a black foster carer support network and has created their own high-quality resources to enhance support for placements where children are not culturally matched with their carers.

Feedback from professionals, carers and external partners is overwhelmingly positive, frequently describing the agency as "phenomenal", "outstanding", and "exceptional."

Records and care recordings across the agency are of an excellent standard. Supervision records and foster carer logs are consistently well written. The manager had developed excellent tools to ensure highlight effective oversight and monitoring of all aspects of the agency.

No requirements or recommendations were made in this inspection.

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: 1241664

Registered provider: Oak Fostering Limited

Registered provider address: Argent House, 5 Goldington Road, Bedford,
Bedfordshire MK40 3JY

Responsible individual: Richard Mills

Registered manager: Deborah Bavister

Telephone number: 01525 868682

Email address: debbiebavister@whiteorchid-care.com

Inspector

Daniel Rankin, Social Care Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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