

Choice Fostering Ltd

Choice Fostering Ltd

19a Studio House Business Centre, Delamare Road, Waltham Cross EN8 9SH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency was registered on 6 November 2017. It provides a range of placements, including emergency, bridging, respite, short-term, long-term, permanent and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 27 approved fostering households and 39 children were receiving support from the agency's approved foster carers. The registered manager has been in post since registration.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 January 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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 December 2022

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 are receiving care and support of a high standard, which is enabling them to make good progress. Most children have lived with their foster carers for over a year, and one child is currently being cared for under staying put arrangement. This contributes to children feeling secure and developing positive attachments with their foster carers. In addition, two thirds of the children are living with their brothers and sisters. This provides them with the opportunity to live with members of their birth family and thereby support their identity and sense of belonging.

Children say that they are happy with their foster carers. They enjoy family life and benefit from the positive experiences they have, such as going on holiday and engaging in clubs and sports.

Foster carers know the children well. They speak knowledgeably and caringly about them and are very committed to them. They are excellent advocates and always attend children's meetings to ensure that they remain an active member of the team around the child. Children's social workers and other professionals recognise the positive contribution of the foster carers. One social worker said of a foster carer, 'They have a very professional approach. My young person is doing well due to the experience and knowledge of the foster carer, who has their best interests at heart.'

Children's education needs are well supported. All the children are either in school or college. Foster carers and supervising social workers work well with those establishments to try and maintain children in their education placements.

There is a well-considered and documented system for ensuring that children are well matched with their foster carers. This is a significant contributory factor in their placement stability. There have only been a small number of unplanned endings in the last year. The agency is very committed to ensuring that if a placement must end, this is done with the least disruption possible.

Children's views are facilitated formally through social activities and consultation. Regular discussions with supervising social workers also ensure that their voices are heard.

Foster carers are positive about the welcome they receive when initially contacting the agency and the professional and sensitive application and approval process. Foster carers benefit from good and relevant training opportunities, which provide them with the skills and knowledge to meet the children's needs.

Foster carers feel exceptionally well supported by the agency. There is formal recognition of their, and the children's, achievements, as well as kindness and consideration of any personal issues they may be experiencing. Foster carers were universally positive about the agency, referencing the availability of their supervising social workers and their professionalism and knowledge.

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

Children's safety and security are given a high priority. Foster carers are well equipped to deal with any safeguarding issues that arise. They receive appropriate and relevant training, are well supported by their supervising social workers and have clear written guidance to follow. Children say that they feel safe and they can identify trusted adults to talk to about any worries. Their safety is further enhanced by two unannounced visits to the foster home each year. There is a strong focus on ensuring that children's voices are regularly heard.

Areas of risk are clearly identified. Comprehensive risk assessments and safe care plans are updated regularly to reflect any current or emerging risks for children. This ensures that foster carers have the most up-to-date information to keep children safe from harm. There have not been many instances of children going missing from their foster homes, but appropriate action is taken when this occurs.

Some of the children currently cared for are particularly vulnerable because of their learning needs and experience of trauma. The supervising social workers are meticulous in liaising with other professionals in the child's network to ensure that all avenues of support are accessed. In addition, supervising social workers and managers are readily available at all hours of the day and night.

Regular team placement stability meetings are attended by all staff, the registered manager and the responsible individual to ensure that everyone is aware of the children most at risk of harm. These are used to share information, identify and discuss any further support needs and promote children's safety and wellbeing in addition to placement stability.

When there are any allegations against foster carers, the manager consults with the local authority designated officer and follows their advice. The manager carries out standards of care investigations, and the foster carers' ongoing suitability to foster is always considered by the fostering panel.

The recruitment of staff meets regulation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is well led and managed by an established manager who is ably assisted by a senior practitioner and deputy manager. This leadership team, along with the responsible individual, is focused on its commitment to provide a child-centred service that enables children to flourish, achieve stability and reach their potential.

There is a high degree of stability in the staff team, with only one new member of staff having been appointed since the last inspection. The staff team mirrors the strong commitment to children and foster carers. They are well supported by access to good-quality training, regular, reflective supervision, regular team and placement stability meetings, and managers who are readily available for advice. Their case

loads are manageable, which enables them to provide support of a high quality to their foster carers.

Monitoring arrangements are well established. These include feedback from foster carers and children, as well as regular reporting on key aspects of the agency. Quarterly management meetings are used to evaluate and plan for the further development of the service.

There are good and effective working relationships with other professionals, who spoke highly of the agency's responsiveness, professionalism, communication and support of the foster carers. This ensures that everyone involved in a child's life works together in their best interests.

The recruitment of foster carers is taken at a steady pace so that it does not impact negatively on the quality of the support to existing foster carers. Foster carers receive regular and reflective supervision that is well recorded and of a good quality.

Reviews of foster carers are timely. However, this is an area that needs further development. Although the agency has embraced the benefits of independent oversight of reviews, fostering independent reviewing officers are currently not involved in the first review, which is considered by the fostering panel. As this review report is prepared solely by the supervising social worker, there is the potential for alternative viewpoints and recommendations to be missed and therefore not considered by the panel. In addition, not all the fostering independent reviewing officers are social workers. As reviews consider the ongoing suitability to foster, a task which only a social worker should do, this needs to be addressed.

The fostering panel comprises of members with a range of experience. However, it is limited in the number of members, including social worker members. The agency is currently addressing this through its recruitment of more panel members. The panel minutes, although thorough, do not clearly record the reasons for the recommendation or the designation of panel members. This means that it is difficult to evaluate if the panel is quorate and does not provide the agency decision-maker with a clear rationale for the panel's recommendation. The agency decision-maker is very recently appointed and has yet to become established in the role.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. In particular, all reviews should be chaired by someone in addition to the supervising social worker, and a comprehensive review report sent to the fostering panel for its consideration as appropriate. Any independent reviewing officers involved should be qualified social workers. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 13.8)
- The registered person should ensure that the panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. In particular, the designation of panel members and the reasons why a foster carer's approval or ongoing suitability is being recommended. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 14.7)

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: 1258890

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Registered provider address: 17 Geddington Court, Eleanor Way, Walthamcross
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Inspector

Rosemary Chapman, Social Care Inspector

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