

Star Fostering Ltd

Unit 2b, East Bridgford Business Park, Kneeton Road, East Bridgford, Nottingham,
Nottinghamshire NG13 8PJ

Assurance visit

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately run independent fostering agency provides placements to children aged from birth to 18 years. The agency provides short-term, long-term, emergency and parent-and-child placements. At the time of the assurance visit, there were eight fostering households caring for 17 children. The manager has been registered since November 2019.

Visit dates: 24 to 25 November 2020

Previous inspection date: Not previously inspected

Previous inspection judgement: Not previously inspected

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children receive good-quality care from foster carers who are supported by experienced staff. The small, family feel of the agency enables children to develop secure and trusting relationships with carers and staff.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, foster carers and staff help children to keep in touch with their families. Staff have supported in supervising these visits. This has enabled children to maintain strong relationships with the people who are important to them.

Children's well-being is promoted by the staff, who have arranged virtual support groups for the children during the period of restrictions. After consulting with the children and finding that one child felt isolated, staff introduced weekly individual well-being sessions. Staff use technology creatively to enable the children to meet together and share their feelings. Promoting social contact between children in similar situations has helped the children's mental health during the pandemic at times when they are prevented from meeting face to face with others outside their household.

The support offered to carers has been adapted to ensure that alternative ways of connecting with carers is introduced when face-to-face meetings are not possible. Managers have worked hard to promote foster carers' resilience and well-being during periods of lockdown.

Most of the children are in school full time and are making good progress. The manager has advocated on behalf of a child who did not have a school place and a foster carer described this support as invaluable. One young person is at college and has plans to go to university.

Children's health needs are promoted. Children receive care that is tailored to their individual needs. The agency has access to a pool of therapists who are available to offer individual therapeutic support to the carers and children.

Some of the carers and children have transferred to the agency from other providers. The carers and the children found that this process went smoothly. The children receive welcome boxes with information about the agency, essential items, and a new blanket. This helps children to feel welcome and valued when coming to live in a new household.

The manager and supervising social worker are involved in matching decisions. There has been one placement breakdown, but this child was successfully moved to another carer within the agency. However, the rationale for the matching of this

child with the new carers was not documented. In another case, an adult parent and child were matched alongside a child already living in a household. Matching documentation regarding this placement did not sufficiently demonstrate how the emotional well-being of the child already living in the household would be protected or how the potential risks, including previous drug use and mental health difficulties, would be mitigated. Matching documentation did not evidence how the carer's skills and experience would meet the individual needs of the children.

The safety of children

The manager and staff know the foster carers well. Foster carers trust the advice and guidance from staff and this encourages a culture of openness. Trusting relationships between professionals and children help to keep the children safe.

None of the children have gone missing from home. There is a missing-from-care policy in place to guide carers in the steps to take should a child go missing and this information is available to foster carers.

The agency does not advocate the use of restraint to manage behaviour. Restraint is only used in exceptional circumstances to prevent a child from harming themselves or others. Following incidents, there is a debrief with the foster carer and behaviour management strategies are reviewed. External support is sourced, when needed, to provide targeted support for managing children's individual complex behaviours.

Each child has an individual risk assessment. These risk assessments are updated following any incidents. Safe-care plans address the individual safe-care needs of the children living in the household. Carers are trained in safeguarding and first aid.

Carers understand the impact of abuse and neglect on children's well-being and behaviour. Children who use alcohol, for example, or self-harm as a coping strategy to manage difficult feelings and/or trauma are referred for external support from relevant mental health services.

Some carers have received training in internet safety. However, the arrangements for children being kept safe online were not sufficient for one child. A child's internet and social media use was not supervised by the foster carers, who felt powerless to put boundaries in place around social media use. The arrangements for supervision of children online were not included in the child's plan until after the child had been contacted by a family member online.

There have been no complaints or allegations. However, one young person was not aware of having been given a copy of the agency's children's guide or any information about how to complain, when her foster carer transferred to the agency in August 2020. Providing children with the contact details of someone to talk to if they have any concerns ensures that children have the opportunity to let someone know if they are unhappy about the quality of care they receive.

Leaders and managers

The experienced manager has built strong partnerships with stakeholders and with foster carers. Some foster carers and staff have transferred to the agency from other providers. The transition of existing carers into the agency is managed well, with minimum impact on any children who may be in placement. Staff and carers speak positively about the leadership of the agency. The style and personality of the manager is an important factor in the early success of the fostering agency. The manager's enthusiasm, commitment, attention to detail, accessibility and warmth are key 'selling points' for foster carers.

Effective monitoring systems are in place. This enables managers to have good oversight of children's progress. The manager analyses referrals and uses this information to shape recruitment activity. There has been steady growth in the first year of the agency's operation and the agency has built a firm foundation.

Foster carers have continued to receive regular supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency has continued to meet the requirements of the regulations by carrying out unannounced visits and facilitating panel meetings remotely.

A diverse panel, with members from a range of backgrounds with varied skillsets, ensures that there is independent ratification of agency decisions and assessments. The panel benefits from having three members who have personal experience of growing up in care. The panel chair and agency decision-maker provide robust scrutiny of assessments and the operation of the agency. The manager receives independent supervision from an external social-work professional.

Staff receive regular supervision. The agency supports the professional development of staff and foster carers. There is a wide-ranging training programme available for foster carers in the coming year, delivered by experienced practitioners. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency adapted training for foster carers to enable face-to-face sessions to continue in line with social-distancing guidance. A student social worker is currently on placement and the manager is completing an award in practice education. There is a strong commitment to creating a learning culture by ensuring that the latest research and theory informs decisions about the care of children.

Staff enjoy working at the agency. One member of staff described her transition into the agency as like 'coming home'.

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 provide a copy of the children's guide to the Chief Inspector, to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding). (Regulation 4)	9 January 2021

Recommendations

- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet or social media. ('Fostering Services: National minimum standards,' 4.4)
- The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. ('Fostering Services: National minimum standards,' 15.1)

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2567404

Registered provider: Star Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: C/O Keith Willis Associates, Gothic House, Barker Gate, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG1 1JU

Responsible individual: Robert North

Registered manager: Sharon North

Inspector

Angela Weston, Social Care Inspector

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