

National Fostering Agency South West

The National Fostering Agency Ltd

The Design Studio, Roman Way, Crusader Park, Warminster BA12 8SP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency's statement of purpose states that it provides a service for looked-after children and young people of all ages whose needs have been assessed by the responsible local authority as being best met by a foster carer. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 149 foster carers, with 179 children placed.

There is currently a registered manager in post. However, they are due to move to a different part of the service, and a new appointment is soon to be announced.

This inspection took place from 3 to 7 November 2025, but we also returned on 1 December 2025 to gather additional evidence.

Inspection dates: 3 to 7 November 2025 and 1 December 2025

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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Date of last inspection: 9 January 2023

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 experience loving and caring homes with their foster families. The carers' commitment to the children has contributed to the positive outcomes and progress children achieve. One child's progress has been exceptional from the time they moved into their foster home. The child's carer has ensured that the appropriate health professionals contribute to the child's plan to maintain progress.

Children experience stability with their carers. Examples were seen of children having lived with their foster families for over 10 years. In other examples, children have the opportunity to remain with their carers in 'staying put' arrangements. These children have a strong sense of belonging to their foster families, due to the care and love of their carers.

The agency is supportive of children's education. Carers recognise the importance of children's education and work with the agency to support children's attendance and engagement. The agency has access to a central service through the wider group which offers specialist education advice and support, for example in identifying children who have been excluded in the previous half term and reaching out to their carers to offer support or pre-empting the support carers may need as children enter school years in which they take their exams.

Children's successes are celebrated by the agency and children can be nominated to receive a 'Star of the Month' award by their carers and supervising social workers. Children receive a certificate and voucher to mark their achievements, helping them to feel valued. Similarly, foster carers are recognised and celebrated through the 'Everyday Hero' awards' and are given a hamper for their continued hard work and achievements.

The agency provides groups to bring children together to socialise and provide support. The agency has recognised a need for a specific group to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and is working to develop this offer. However, further consideration is needed for disabled children; at present, the main offer is adapted to accommodate those with additional needs, but this is not always suitable to meet diverse needs.

The agency has worked closely with children to develop a tool to capture feedback created by and for children. This tool is now well embedded into practice, and its use is indicative of the high value children place on its use. Leaders and managers analyse the data and use this to understand the children's lived experience and make improvements. However, for children with additional needs and younger children, the tool is not appropriately adapted and there is not anything of a similar standard to capture their views and to demonstrate how they have influenced the care they receive.

Support groups for carers are provided in multiple locations across the region and carers reported finding these useful. In addition, carers have access to a wealth of training which they say is of good quality and relevant to their roles and needs. Overall, carers' compliance with mandatory training is high. However, it is not always clear what action has been taken with carers who have not completed mandatory training or training recommended to improve practice in a timely manner.

While carers feel supported by the agency, some reported that an area of need is for respite care to be more readily available to them. Leaders and managers are acutely aware of this need within the service and the lack of such provision. The agency accepts applications from people who only wish to offer respite as one of the ways they are trying to address this issue.

The quality of assessments of foster carers is inconsistent. While some assessments were detailed with good levels of analysis, others lacked critical analysis and exploration of concerns. For example, some assessments did not sufficiently explore how carers respond to challenges, their previous experiences of fostering or significant allegations made against the carers. In addition, this information is not always shared with the panel, or the panel has not always sufficiently explored concerns to inform their recommendation for approval.

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

Overall, carers understand risk and children are protected from harm. Where there are safeguarding concerns, including children who are missing from home or at risk of exploitation, carers are involved in multi-agency safety plans to respond to risk. When children are missing from home, carers follow safeguarding procedures and remain in contact with the agency or out of hours as appropriate.

Carers encourage children's independence through age-appropriate decision-making and safe risk-taking. Carers have sensitive conversations with children about social media, mobile phones and unsupervised time away from the home to increase the children's understanding of risks and how to keep themselves safe.

In most cases, when risks increase for children, the agency escalates concerns appropriately to ensure a multi-agency response and decision. In addition, the agency puts in place further packages of support to help carers to maintain stability and increase the safety of children with higher levels of safeguarding need. However, challenge of other agencies' practice is not consistently strong, leading to drift and delay in some children receiving the support they need.

Allegations are responded to in line with agency procedures and where appropriate, advice is sought from the local authority designated officer (LADO). Appropriate immediate action has been taken to safeguard children when allegations have been made. Where the threshold for LADO investigation has not been met, internal investigations have taken place to further explore concerns. However, the child's

views are not always evident when concerns are investigated, and it is not always clear if the outcome is shared with the child.

In general, standards of care investigations are of good quality and address abuse of children and poor practice of carers. However, in some cases, standards of care processes have not been followed in a cohesive or timely way, which has resulted in delayed decision-making and uncertainty for carers and children. In addition, systems to monitor practice concerns and standards of care are not used in a thematic way to improve the service.

For a very small number of children, the agency has recognised that carers may need to restrain children to keep them safe. In these circumstances, the agency liaises with the local authority to share decision-making and to ensure that carers are trained in recognised restraint models. Incidents of restraint receive an appropriate level of management oversight. However, the views of the child are not always captured in records.

In some households, it has been appropriate and necessary to use some restrictive practices. These have been well assessed by external professionals and specialist equipment has been provided, which is clearly recorded. However, the review of the use of this equipment has not been completed and recorded, nor diarised to keep under regular consideration. In addition, language used in some cases about the levels of supervision is inaccurate, which leads to an unclear understanding of the needs of the child.

During the inspection, it was not evident that concerns relating to a child's risk of exploitation were followed up with the local authority. This did not ensure that action was taken to increase the child's safety in a timely manner. This concern had not been identified through management oversight and was only identified as a result of this inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency's child-centred ethos and values are at the heart of the staff's and carers' practice. Carers value the dedication and support given by managers and their supervising social workers. Examples include workers being readily available to them and knowing them and the children well.

Leaders and managers prioritise supporting and retraining their carers and, as a result, carers feel valued by the agency. The agency has a number of carers who have been with the service for many years. This has further led to recommendations to grow the agency and there has been some stability achieved in the area of fostering recruitment.

Staff are enthusiastic about the agency and enjoy working there. They value the management style of leaders and feel well supported in their roles. There is a strong commitment to staff development, and leaders and managers ensure that staff have

access to training that improves their understanding of children's need and how best to support them.

Staff receive regular supervision sessions that are of a high standard. Case discussions within staff supervision provide a clear rationale and management oversight of decisions made. However, this detail is not always captured in the child's or carers' case recording. This means that decisions may not be clear to children if they were to access their records now or in the future.

The agency's panel arrangements have recently changed to a regional service shared between agencies within the parent group. This has provided the agency with weekly access to panels, which helps to minimise delays. The panel chair, adviser and agency decision-maker all hold the relevant experience and subject knowledge, making them well placed in their respective roles. However, when complex or sensitive issues have been presented to panel, there has been a lack of exploration of applicants' vulnerabilities that may impact on their ability to foster.

Team managers understand the details of individual families and situations well. However, at a more senior level the thematic knowledge of the agency's patterns, trends and practice is lacking, in particular around the agency's functioning in respect of unplanned endings, the impact of specialist support and learning from complaints and allegations. This does not help senior leaders to continuously improve practice and the experiences of children.

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, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered provider and the registered manager must, having regard to— the size of the fostering agency, its statement of purpose, and the numbers and needs of the children placed by the fostering agency, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on or manage the fostering agency (as the case may be) with sufficient care, competence and skill. (Regulation 8 (1)(a)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that all assessments of carers sufficiently explore concerns and critically analyse the impact of these on carers' capacity and ability to safely care for children. In addition, the registered person must ensure appropriate levels of scrutiny are provided at fostering panel. The registered person must ensure that there are systems in place to identify themes, patterns and trends in all aspects of the agency's functioning and take action to continuously improve the service.	2 February 2026
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which— is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b)) The registered person must ensure that all safeguarding concerns are followed up with the relevant agencies in a timely manner. They must ensure that standards of care	2 February 2026

investigations are completed, and decisions on the outcome are made in a timely manner. In addition, the registered person must ensure a robust response and challenge when there are concerns about other agencies' response to risk.	
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Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there, including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child. In particular, the registered person should ensure that the rationale for using any type of restriction is clear. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 10.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the agency has the facilities to work with children with physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties or who speak English as an additional language. In particular, the registered person should ensure that communications and services are inclusive for all children. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.12)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service. This includes undertaking training in a timely manner. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 1.7)
- The registered person should ensure that information about a 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. In particular, the registered person should ensure that managerial oversight and decision-making is recorded on file. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.6)

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: 2662429

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