

National Fostering Agency London South

National Fostering Agency, Waterside House, 20 Riverside Way, Cowley, Uxbridge UB8 2YF

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

National Fostering Agency London South is an independent fostering agency. The fostering agency registered with Ofsted in August 2022 and the manager registered in June 2023. The manager is suitably skilled and experienced.

The fostering agency provides a wide range of fostering placements for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short-term, medium-term and long-term placements. It also provides parent and child placements and supports 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency was providing care to 154 children.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the agency since the last inspection is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the agency in response to the incident were considered alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Inspection date: 10 November 2023

Date of previous inspection: 14 August 2023

This monitoring visit

The agency was inspected in August 2023, and was judged as good in all areas. Three recommendations were made to improve practice.

At the end of October 2023, a serious incident occurred. Ofsted is aware that the investigations into this incident are at an early stage.

This monitoring visit was undertaken in response to this serious incident, to address any specific concerns and to seek assurances about the welfare of other children cared for by the agency.

In carrying out this work, discussions took place with leaders and managers within the agency, and relevant documentation held by the agency was reviewed. The recommendations made at the agency's full inspection were relevant to the concerns around this serious incident, so were reviewed as part of this inspection.

Since the last inspection, the manager has implemented a number of improvements in response to the recommendations made. However, some of these improvements are at a very early stage. The agency has a well-established tracking system to identify the most vulnerable children within the agency. This is based on an assessment of risk. The agency's systems provide an oversight of all children, but this high-risk tracking process facilitates weekly discussion about, and review of, children deemed to be at high risk. From these meetings, plans are put in place to mitigate risks. Strategies might include convening a multi-agency meeting, seeking specialist support or providing in-house support to fostering households. However, the risks discussed, and strategies agreed, do not result in safer caring plans or risk assessments being updated. While information is accessible on the agency's recording system, plans and, more specifically, strategies, to reduce risk may not be readily accessible to foster carers.

Children's safer caring plans and risk assessments are not specific enough to children. They do not fully identify their individual risks and vulnerabilities. The potential impact is that foster carers may lack the clarity and the support that clear strategies would give them. This can also impact on placement stability. Leaders and managers recognise that more work needs to be done to improve safer caring plans and risk assessments.

Leaders and managers are looking at ways to track and respond to children deemed to present with lower-level risks more effectively, before they become high risk.

This independent fostering agency is part of large organisation that benefits from good-quality resources, including clinical support. Senior leaders use data-tracking systems to oversee practice and they continue to improve and enhance these systems. Notifications are reviewed to identify any patterns or trends. Audits are carried out and the learning is shared across the wider organisation. Leaders and managers are proactive in providing information to foster carers about self-harm.

Overall, the agency provides good training opportunities for foster carers and their supervising social workers. Further work is being carried out to make training and development opportunities more accessible to foster carers who work full time. It is important that foster carers receive the training they need to meet the specific needs

of the children they are caring for. Training has not always been timely, indicating a lack of proactiveness in this area. Leaders and managers are exploring the quality of training to ensure that it is sufficiently in-depth for those who need it.

Raising the quality of recording is ongoing work. Foster carers are increasingly being encouraged to record electronically. A more therapeutic and reflective approach to recording is becoming embedded across the agency.

The manager is confident that supervising social workers understand their roles in relation to safeguarding. It is evident that children have opportunities to speak up about their day-to-day experiences. This is supported by a relatively stable staff team, enabling trusting relationships to be formed with children.

The effectiveness of the agency has not declined since the full inspection. The serious incident has brought into focus the need to expedite the agency's responses to the recommendations made. Safeguarding practice was not seen as having declined since the full inspection, but further steps must be taken to strengthen practice.

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
Independent fostering agencies — duty to secure welfare The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a)) This specifically relates to the need to ensure that risk assessments and safer caring plans are individualised and specific to children's needs, risks and vulnerabilities. They must provide clear strategies for foster carers to follow, and/or cross-reference to any agreed strategies to manage risk.	22 December 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers complete training identified as part of their ongoing development, needs and experience. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 20.4)
- The registered person should ensure that all records kept by the service are compliant with the service's policies and procedures. Specifically, this refers to foster carer logs, staff supervision records, children's case records and foster carer case records ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

Information about this inspection

The purpose of this visit was to monitor the action taken and the progress made by the independent fostering agency since its last Ofsted inspection.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 2688691

Registered provider: The National Fostering Agency Ltd

Registered provider address: Outcomes First Group Ltd, Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: Lynn Webb

Registered Manager: Johnson Shebioba

Inspector

Corrinne Barker, Social Care Inspector

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