

Next Step Fostering Services

41 Stone Street, Faversham ME13 8PH

Monitoring visit

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Next Step Fostering Services is an independent fostering agency operating across Kent, East London, Surrey, Thames Valley and several London boroughs. The service, part of the National Fostering Group, provides a range of placements including respite, short-term, long-term and parent and child arrangements.

At the time of this monitoring visit, the agency had 49 fostering households providing care to 62 children.

The registered manager has been in post since September 2022.

Inspection date: 5 February 2026

Date of last inspection: 9 September 2024

This monitoring visit

This monitoring visit was initiated following the death of a child placed with the agency. The child had life-limiting and complex healthcare needs. This was the second child death experienced by the agency since August 2024. Ofsted does not investigate the circumstances of such events. Instead, the focus of this visit was to evaluate the quality of support provided to children, the effectiveness of support for foster carers and staff, and how the service ensures that children's needs are met following a significant event.

Staff reported feeling well supported following the recent death. A range of supportive mechanisms are available, including reflective practice sessions, input from the clinical team, access to the human resources team and the employee assistance programme, and a workplace culture that enables open discussion about emotional wellbeing.

Children's social workers spoke positively about the quality of care provided by foster carers. They highlighted strong, nurturing attachments between children and foster carers, carers who advocate well and support children's individual needs, and examples of exceptional care for children with complex needs.

The agency's recording systems for both children's and carers' files are of high quality, consistent and up to date. Supervision for carers is regular and purposeful, ensuring that children are seen and that relationships are developed.

The agency is responsive to the needs of foster carers who are grieving. Following the recent death, the child death policy was reviewed and strengthened to reduce any perceived pressure on carers to accept new placements before they are ready.

The foster carers for the child who died continue to receive support from their supervising social worker. This means that, during this difficult period, a familiar and consistent person remains available to them.

Carers have access to a broad range of training relevant to disabilities, health needs and specialist practice. Training records demonstrate high levels of commitment. The carers for the child who died recently had completed bespoke agency training, as well as learning from the child's school and the regional hospice.

Children with life-limiting conditions continue to access respite care through a regional hospice known to them, ensuring continuity and specialist understanding. Therapeutic support is also available for children, including those experiencing bereavement after the loss of a child in their home.

Following a previous child death 18 months earlier, the service completed a debrief and learning review. The registered manager delivered a presentation to staff, strengthening organisational learning. Following the recent death, a further debrief and learning review will be carried out.

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: SC036540

Registered provider: Next Step Fostering Services Limited

Registered provider address: Atria, Spa Road, Bolton BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: Neil McCarthy

Registered manager: Clement Deniran

Inspector

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

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