

Anchor Foster Care Services

Anchor Foster Care Services Limited

69A Maidstone Road, Chatham ME4 6DP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This family-run independent fostering agency covers the south-east and midlands areas. It has a head office in Kent with office hubs in Milton Keynes and Derby. The organisation offers a range of foster placements including emergency, short-term and long-term foster placements. This includes standard placements and specialist placements for parent-and-child, children with complex needs and disabilities and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The agency uses the therapeutic crisis intervention approach and methodology to underpin its work. The agency currently supports 64 fostering households, providing care for 75 children.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 January 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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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	outstanding
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The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

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: outstanding

Children are thriving and making exceptional progress because they are cared for by dedicated foster parents. The relationships between the children and their carers are built on trust and compassion, and this helps the children to feel safe and secure. All the children spoke with kindness when talking about their experiences and the support that they receive from foster families.

Supervising social workers provide exceptionally strong support to families, exceeding the requirements of their duties. They ensure that the children know them well and they form strong relationships with them. This allows the supervising social workers to spend time with the children and check on their progress.

Children are settled in their homes. Some children said that they would like to stay at their foster parents' home, despite having opportunities to return to their families. Children's permanency is achieved as a direct result of the outstanding agency support and excellent joint working.

The shared therapeutic vision of the agency is clear and is understood by all involved. This shared approach enhances placement stability. The agency focuses on identifying children's needs and ensures that they receive personalised support. Foster parents are also robustly trained and empowered to meet children's individual needs.

Children's education and health are core priorities at this agency. Supervising social workers and the managers go above and beyond to ensure that children's needs are understood by external professionals. For instance, when one child was at risk of bullying and wanted to leave their education provision, the staff worked relentlessly to prevent this. Consequently, the child is achieving 100% attendance.

Children are carefully matched to the families. The needs of the children and the skills and experiences of carers are at the core of this process. Foster parents are involved in the matching process at the earliest opportunity. This enables well-informed decision-making and well-considered preparations for the arrival of the children. The agency is dedicated to upskilling the carers when needed.

All children, including birth children in fostering households, attend activities organised by the agency. Fun activities and events are well attended. The findings of a recent review resulted in children being able to participate in more age-appropriate activities, where they could make connections and form friendships.

Foster parents enjoy the support groups that are being facilitated in all the regional hubs. They stated that they value these experiences, as they help them to relax, share their interests and seek others' views when they need any advice.

The agency continues to care for children who travel to the United Kingdom to seek asylum. These children are well supported, and their needs are understood by carers. One child expressed gratitude towards their fostering family because they make him feel valued and supported. They are thankful because they attend college and have secured a part-time job, and they enjoy their social life. Supervising social workers are proactive in assisting children to locate birth relatives when possible. This allows the children to feel respected and that their wishes are being responded to.

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

Children live in homes that provide safety and security. They feel safe and have trusted adults with whom they can share their worries. Children's plans and needs are well recorded, providing clarity on what actions foster parents need to take when they are concerned about a child's safety.

When children are missing from home or are late to return, foster parents respond in a timely and appropriate way. Suitable actions are taken when concerns arise relating to any form of exploitation. The agency ensures that relevant professionals are part of decision-making in creating a safety plan for a child. However, on one occasion, staff did not follow the necessary steps to share important information with the foster parents. As a result, the foster parents did not have the necessary guidance and support to take the required action.

Children are helped to understand their vulnerabilities. Foster parents are creative at educating children about the risks they may face. When additional support is required, the agency allocates support workers who focus on positive activities with children and carry out targeted prevention work. Foster parents are appreciative of the support workers' involvement.

There has been a positive shift in the robustness of safeguarding practices since the last inspection. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and this leads to a cohesive approach to safeguarding. Professional curiosity and an understanding of contextual safeguarding are incorporated into the everyday practice of the agency.

When safeguarding concerns or allegations arise, they are appropriately reported, referred and investigated. In many cases, the independent consultant will carry out the investigation, enabling an additional layer of scrutiny. The registered manager follows up any complaints and addresses the issues at the earliest opportunity. Most importantly, all relevant learning is implemented for agency staff and foster parents.

Safer recruitment checks are carried out with appropriate scrutiny. The agency exceeds the minimum requirements for recruitment checks. The interview process consists of three stages, and this enables thorough decision-making relating to staff suitability. Applicants use a self-reflection tool before the panel interview. These arrangements help the agency to set high standards and expectations at an early stage.

Improvements have been made in notifying the regulatory body about the serious events since the last inspection. However, the process is not implemented consistently, notably at weekends, and on some occasions, there have been some unnecessary delays.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are ambitious and have high expectations of the foster parents and the children in their care. A cohesive leadership approach is supported by an embedded therapeutic ethos that is filtered down to everyone in the organisation. Leaders, managers and staff have a clear understanding about the agency's strengths and how these can be developed further. The agency is managed by suitably qualified and long-standing leaders and the registered manager.

Since the previous inspection, the registered manager has ensured that the action plan is used and adhered to by all staff. Their monitoring and oversight are meticulous, and they ensure that their records thoroughly reflect their scrutiny and the reasons for their decision-making. Reflective practice has been developed and is used effectively.

New staff joining the agency experience a thorough and informative induction. They are well informed about the organisation's ethos, and they receive all the necessary information that equips them to fulfil their duties to a high standard. This helps new staff to feel confident when meeting children and carers. One new staff member said that they greatly appreciate how the leaders are aiming to get the best from them. In addition, staff told inspectors that they value the opportunities for their developmental growth and feel respected for their commitments to families and children.

Staff and panel members are appropriately qualified. Panel members are highly skilled at scrutiny and professional challenge. The panel is diverse in terms of expertise, which enables robust oversight and promotes safe and secure foster placements. Panel members receive thorough annual appraisals of their practice, and all members receive the relevant training.

The panel chair is respected by the panel members and leaders at this organisation. This is because their professionalism has been developed through years of experience and the inclusive method of working. The panel chair has established effective working relationships, including with the panel adviser.

The agency decision-maker is proficient and has timely oversight. They make sure that the cases are appropriately prioritised to ensure that the permanency of children is secured.

All staff receive supervision at agreed intervals. Appraisals are carried out in cooperation with staff, and ambitious goals are identified for their professional development. Staff's ideas are included in the development of this agency, and staff feel that their views are respected.

The requirements from the previous inspection have been met.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person should have a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do when a notifiable event arises at the weekend. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 29.1)
- The registered person should ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child in their household. The fostering service should follow up with the responsible authority when all such necessary information has not been provided. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 3.9)

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: SC036598

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Sonata Brisley, Social Care Inspector

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