

Progress Children's Services

Progress Children's Services Ltd

Progress House, 127 Millfields Road, Wolverhampton WV4 6JG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is a private limited company. The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency also offers short-break services.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency was providing placements for 43 children living in 38 fostering households.

The registered manager is experienced and is in the process of completing the level 5 in leadership and management.

Inspection dates: 24 to 28 February 2025

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: 22 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

A key feature of this agency is the use of standard and enhanced flexible packages of care. These are tailored to the children's needs. An enhanced package includes a range of additional bespoke services. For example, foster carers receive weekly or monthly sessions with the agency's therapeutic team, and the children receive direct work from family support workers. Another strength of this approach is that the children move between standard and enhanced packages based on their assessed developing needs.

Children experience sensitive, planned moves into their new homes. They build positive relationships with their foster families and flourish in many areas of their lives.

The dedication, professional skills and knowledge of foster carers and staff ensure that the children in their care excel. The direct input of the agency's therapeutic team ensures that there is a dynamic and multi-disciplinary approach to, and understanding of, the children's education, health, social and emotional needs. The insight and understanding gained by foster carers, staff and external professionals enable them to support the children to make significant progress from their personal starting points.

Foster families and staff are proud of the children's achievements and celebrate their successes. One child described moving from residential care into their foster home and how their foster carer helped them experience having their first pet. They visited an animal shelter over a period to walk several dogs before choosing the right one for them. The child described caring for and being responsible for the dog as well as the dog providing them with the confidence to walk him independently to meet his friends.

The agency employs family support workers who work directly with the children. They support with focused one-to-one work on topics or areas for development linked to the children's individual care plans. They also run regular youth groups, holiday schemes and consultation groups, which all the children can engage with. Children told the inspector how much they value the relationships they have with their family support worker and the opportunities that they are given to socialise with other children with shared life experiences.

The agency promotes wraparound care for foster families and the children, both within the agency and the wider organisation. The inspector heard examples of regular planned respite for the children, both with linked foster families within the agency and the organisation's specialist short-breaks residential service. The agency works in partnership with the organisation's children's homes to enable the children in residential care to step across into foster families. The organisation's directors are also proactively considering how they might support a child with physical and

learning needs to move from their long-term foster family to their forever adult home, while enabling their current foster carers to continue to play a grandparenting role.

The agency and foster families maintain strong links with the children who have left their care, as well as with young people who either remain living with foster carers in 'staying put' arrangements or who move on to adulthood. As adults, they still seek and receive support from their foster families and the agency; they are still active participants in their foster families' events and involve their foster families in celebrating their own successes and adult milestones.

The agency is inclusive and open to applications from individuals interested in becoming foster carers from a cross-section of society. The registered manager and staff are responsive and inclusive in their approach, and applicants experience a warm welcome from their first contact. Managers sensitively match new applicants to independent social workers, who complete timely, analytical assessments. Prospective foster carers describe building positive relationships with their linked social workers, who support them and their wider family and friends through assessment, panel and approval. In particular, prospective foster carers described the time that assessing social workers spent with birth children, helping them understand fostering and other children's experiences.

Foster families receive a wide range of support from the agency, supervising social workers, family support workers and the agency's therapeutic team. This support is flexible, recognising the geographical spread and individual needs of foster families. The leadership team and staff work hard to ensure that resources are accessible, for example running foster carer support groups at the same time as children's weekend youth groups. The agency also runs an ambassador scheme, which provides peer support between foster carers. The number of foster carers who are ambassadors has reduced over the last couple of years, and some new foster carers were not aware of this scheme. The registered manager acknowledged this during the inspection and is considering ways of relaunching the scheme.

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

There is a strong focus on child protection and safeguarding within the agency. Children feel safe in their foster homes. Foster carers and staff have good knowledge of the potential risks to the children and follow established procedures to keep them safe. They attend relevant training that helps them understand and respond appropriately to concerns about children's safety.

The leadership team understands its safeguarding responsibilities and has systems in place that give it good management oversight. This ensures that any worries or concerns are quickly identified, prioritising the children's safety and ensuring support to foster families.

The registered manager and staff hold stability meetings. These provide a range of interventions that help foster families and children when there are changes to

circumstances or the need for additional support. The registered manager monitors the success of these interventions and any unplanned endings. She is proactive in implementing new initiatives because of this monitoring. For example, she has completed a lessons learned exercise on unplanned endings with one of the agency's therapists. She also considered feedback from placing authorities and foster carers. This has resulted in the introduction of a new matching tool to ensure that more comprehensive information is available at the point of matching a new child with a potential foster family. She is continuing to monitor patterns and trends to ensure this new tool is having an effective impact.

Recent unplanned endings have included parent and child placements. The inspector heard that foster carers do not always have the opportunity to meet the parent before they move into the foster home, and that in one case, important historical information was not shared by the placing authority.

Children's behaviours are managed well. Foster carers are proactive and supported effectively by guidance from supervising social workers. For example, when children go missing from their foster homes, foster carers respond promptly and act in line with the children's plans. Staff and foster carers ensure that they notify and work with partner agencies. These actions help to promote and maintain the children's welfare. Supervising social workers support foster carers to reflect on their responses to children. Where appropriate, supervising social workers and foster carers can work with advice and guidance from the agency's therapeutic team. This joined-up approach ensures that the children are actively safeguarded.

The agency's fostering panel, reviewing officer and agency decision-maker make timely and appropriate decisions, which promote the welfare of children and ensure the ongoing suitability of foster carers.

The recruitment process for foster carers, staff, contracted staff and panel ensures that only suitable people are recruited. This helps to ensure that children are not placed at risk through contact with unsuitable adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A new registered manager was appointed in September 2024. There has been considered succession planning for this role. The new registered manager has been mentored by the current responsible individual, who has excellent insight into the fostering agency as they were historically the registered manager.

The leadership team has a clear understanding of the ethos and principles underpinning the agency. Its monitoring is comprehensive and ensures that leaders have excellent overview of the status of retention, recruitment, assessment, approval and continuing approval of foster carers and the impact this has on the availability of foster families for children. Since being in post, the new registered manager has completed and submitted to Ofsted one internal quality assurance report. This report did not evidence consultation with foster carers, children placed with foster carers and their placing authority. These systems exist within the agency

and the registered manager will consider how to incorporate them into her next report.

The leadership team and staff are engaged with the wider fostering sector, and this ensures that relevant practice and research are captured and disseminated. For example, the agency has a foster carer recruitment and retention strategy, which has supported them to continue to recruit and approve new foster carers but not match the rate at which foster carers are deregistering. The responsible individual has recently completed a detailed research paper considering the local and national patterns, trends and challenges in this area. This has been shared with the directors and has resulted in the agency restructuring staffing and implementing new strategies to support with future recruitment ventures.

The leadership team has skilfully managed the recent changes to the staff team. As a result, the new team is highly motivated. Staff feel well supported and value comprehensive induction, probation, supervision, appraisal, team meetings, training and team building days. All staff and foster carers undertake ongoing therapeutic training from the agency's therapeutic team to understand the importance of relationships between children and the trauma they have experienced. These systems enable staff to reflect on and develop their expertise and safeguarding practice, and they feed into the development of the agency.

Throughout this period of staff change, the leadership team has been in close consultation with foster carers. For example, a series of foster carer conferences have enabled foster carers to share their experiences and observations with the leadership team. The leadership team has been proactive in responding to this feedback, and checking back with foster carers has ensured that organisational change has not impacted on support to foster families or outcomes for the children.

The panel chair, vice chair and independent reviewing officer are experienced and knowledgeable. The agency decision-maker makes well-informed and clearly evidenced final decisions. They are passionate about the important roles that panel and reviews play. The panel chair and vice chair regularly review the effectiveness of panel to ensure that foster families, the children and agency are best served. They have developed valued relationships with foster families. For example, their direct contact with prospective and approved foster carers after every panel provides the leadership team with valuable quality assurance information. This enables the leadership team and staff to address any observations or matters raised swiftly and to celebrate insightful, reflective work.

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 person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purpose of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2) (3))	30 May 2025

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that, prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information should be provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and include the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service should follow up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe, caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer safe. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 15.2)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service.
('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 21.2)

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: SC036627

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Inspector

Dawn Bennett, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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