

Foster Care Associates Yorks and Lincs

Foster Care Associates Limited

Europa View, Sheffield Business Park, Sheffield S9 1XH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates Limited is an independent fostering service, which is part of a national organisation. The agency provides placements on an emergency, long-term and short-term basis, including parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 243 fostering households caring for 321 children. Thirty-three young people are living with foster parents under 'staying put' arrangements. These arrangements enable young people over the age of 18 years to remain living with their foster parents.

The registered manager has been in post since September 2021.

Inspection dates: 28 April to 2 May 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	outstanding
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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: 16 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 make exceptional progress from their starting points due to the care that they receive from their foster parents. Foster parents know the children very well and are fully committed to providing outstanding quality care. Children are cherished by their foster parents and are an integral part of their foster family's lives. The quality of care helps children to develop a strong sense of belonging, permanence and feeling valued and loved.

Ten children and seven foster carers were spoken with during the inspection. Comments from children about their foster parents include:

- 'I am happy and get looked after well. [Name of foster parents] are good people.'
- '[Name of foster parents] are caring people. They are genuine people and listen when you have any problems.'
- 'It is like having a really nice, big family. I would change nothing; I really like it here and want to stay forever.'

Children can stay with their foster parents as long as they need to and 'staying put' arrangements are discussed and planned in a timely way. In addition, a large majority of foster parents keep in touch with children when they have moved on to other living arrangements. This helps children to maintain their relationships with trusted adults and remain an important part of their foster family.

The agency's process for welcoming a child into a new foster family is extremely robust. There is excellent management oversight regarding decisions about whether a foster parent can provide a child with the care that they need. Foster parents, along with the supervising social worker and the placing social worker, are consulted as part of the decision-making process. This reduces the risk of children moving in with foster parents who cannot meet their needs.

There is an unwavering commitment by the agency to promoting placement stability for children and this has led to innovative practice to achieve this goal. For example, since the last inspection, the agency has developed and embedded its placement stability strategy and has been creative in using the therapy and participation teams to support this objective. Consequently, this has seen a reduction in the number of times a child has had to move to a new foster family. When children have had to move, the agency has been diligent in ensuring that children experience continuity by, wherever possible, assisting them to live with foster parents who are already familiar to them.

Children's right to receive education and be healthy is deeply championed by the agency and foster parents, who worked tirelessly to develop positive working

relationships with external professionals. As a result, the educational achievement of children is excellent. Children are in very good physical health, and when children require specialist health services or interventions, these are identified in a timely way through close partnership working. Foster parents support children to attend such appointments.

Children have opportunities to participate in a variety of activities organised by the agency. One child described the agency as a 'community' due to the events they organise and how this has helped them to meet up with other children and make friends. In addition, foster parents support children to take part in recreational activities such as swimming, go-karting and attending Cadets. This has helped one child to gain employment as a 'rookie lifeguard' and has helped two children to pursue careers in the armed forces.

The agency is strongly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and continues to seek development opportunities as the world evolves. By keeping abreast of research, the agency understands barriers to inclusion that children may face. This includes developing strategies to increase children's engagement, reduce isolation and provide foster parents with the tools to be champions in their own homes. For example, the agency has developed a QR code so that children can access the children's guide in several different languages. In addition, work has taken place to ensure that children have the right to have the culture and heritage that they identify with accurately recorded on the electronic case management system. However, the agency could do more to ensure that foster parents have timely access to training which helps them to meet the communication needs of the children they care for.

The overwhelming majority of foster parents have an exceptionally positive relationship with the agency, and they feel valued and supported. Comments from foster parents about the agency include:

- 'I think they are a good agency. I have been here for 14 years and comfortable doing what I am doing. I feel supported and listened to.'
- 'I feel really trusted as a carer. [Name of Agency] will advocate for us if needed and share our voice. We are providing the care, and this is respected by the agency.'
- 'The agency has reignited and rejuvenated my passion for fostering and my faith in policy, procedure and protocol. They have filled my cup back up.'

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

Children feel safe living with their foster families. They report being able to talk to their foster parents about any worries they may have and how their foster parents help them. In addition, children are provided with the chance to build strong and trusted relationships with adults outside their foster families. Children's views in

relation to their feelings of safety are routinely sought by supervising social workers during their visits to the foster family, which take place over and above the frequency expected by the agency. Children are also supported by participation officers when they need bespoke pieces of work or additional support, as well as having access to independent advocates. This promotes an open culture where concerns about a child's safety can be quickly identified and acted on.

Children's risk management plans are bespoke and detail the child's known risks and vulnerabilities. The plans are easy to understand and are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are updated in response to any changes and are accurate. Where appropriate, children are involved in contributing to these plans. The plans help foster parents to know how to manage risks effectively and help children to become increasingly safer.

Foster parents know how to respond if a child goes missing from home. They work closely with the agency and external professionals, such as the police, and will search for the child. Once a child has returned home, the foster parents and supervising social worker will speak with the child to try to understand why they went missing and put in place strategies to prevent the child from going missing again. Equally, where there are risks in relation to exploitation, internet safety and self-injurious behaviour, clear strategies are put in place by the agency alongside the foster parents and the placing social worker to reduce risk.

The agency's approach to positive behaviour management is thoroughly embedded and reviewed through regular foster parent supervision. In situations where foster parents take a behaviour-led approach to managing behaviour, as opposed to a therapeutic one, support is quickly available to foster parents through training and through direct work with the therapy team.

The agency's management of the recruitment of staff and foster parents is robust and meets regulatory requirements. The assessment of prospective foster parents is rigorous and subject to scrutiny through a tight quality assurance process conducted by assessment managers and the fostering panel. Once prospective foster parents are approved by the fostering panel, their suitability to foster is reviewed by the agency on a yearly basis by an independent chair. These mechanisms ensure that only suitable adults work with and care for children.

Where there are concerns about the quality of care a foster parent provides, or where there are allegations of harm, the agency responds in a timely manner. They work with relevant professionals to promote the safety and well-being of the child, while at the same time providing support for the foster parent. When appropriate, foster parents are returned to the fostering panel, where their suitability to foster is considered and decisions are made regarding additional training and support, de-registration and referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Annual health and safety assessments of foster parents' homes, unannounced visits by the supervising social workers and assessments of adults within the foster

parent's support network ensure that children live in a safe and well-maintained home environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are ambitious for children and demonstrate an innovative and research-based approach to service improvements. They have very high expectations of themselves, their staff and foster parents. Leaders and managers lead by example and live the values and ethos of the statement of purpose in their day-to-day practice with staff, foster parents and professionals. They have worked at pace to address the shortfalls identified at the last inspection.

The registered manager has exceptional oversight of the service and understands what is working well and areas for improvement. She is supported well by the fostering service managers, the operations director and the responsible individual, who all work cohesively and are relentless in wanting to do the right thing for children.

Staff morale is very high. Staff feel connected to leaders and managers, feel valued and supported and have confidence in them. Staff are enthusiastic about their roles and are fully committed to making a positive difference to children's lives. Staff retention is high, with many members of staff having worked for the agency for a considerable number of years.

The agency fulfils its statement of purpose. The training and support offer for staff and foster parents is substantial and tailored to children's individual needs. Staff and foster parents benefit from regular supervision that promotes their welfare, development, children's safety and progress.

The fostering panel is diverse and performs its function of scrutiny and quality assurance very well. The agency decision-maker, fostering panel chair, vice-chair and foster panel members are all suitably qualified and experienced.

External professionals speak highly of the agency. They describe positive working relationships with the supervising social workers and are complimentary about foster parents and the progress that children make. One placing social worker said: 'We work as a team and we learn to develop the plans. Sometimes solutions take time to figure out, but we do that as a team.'

Case records are beautifully written and capture the child's journey. The use of language is kind and caring. Case records are written to the child and help children to celebrate their achievements and understand how they have been helped.

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

Recommendation

- The registered provider should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. In particular, that training is provided to foster parents to help to support them to meet the specific communication needs of the children they care for. ('Fostering Services: national minimum standards', 20.8)

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: SC038256

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Inspectors

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