

Barnardo's North West Fostering Service (NW Region)

Barnardo's

5 Lineside Close, Liverpool L25 2UD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's North West Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency based in Liverpool. The service has satellite offices in Preston and in Cumbria. This service operates in Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria.

The agency provides emergency, short-term and long-term placements for children. It also provides short breaks for disabled children who may be living with their own families or children living in foster care.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had 86 fostering households providing placements for 77 children.

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 May 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
---	-------------

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
---	------

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 20 June 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children build positive and trusted relationships with their foster families. This helps them to feel part of their foster families and gives them a sense of belonging.
- Most children stay with their foster families for the long term. This provides them with consistency and stability in their lives.
- Foster carers support children through different life stages. They help children to develop independence skills and prepare them well for adulthood.
- Children enjoy a range of leisure activities. As a result, children develop new skills, build their confidence and have fun.
- Effective support to foster carers and children promotes resilience and placement stability.
- Good quality assessments prepare prospective foster carers well. Foster carers understand their role and show great commitment to children. As a result, children benefit from high standards of care and make good progress.
- Foster carers and staff understand and manage risk well. A prompt response to concerns promotes children's safety and welfare.
- Children feel safe in their foster families.
- Good working relationships with partner agencies support children's progress and well-being.
- Managers, staff and foster carers display passion and commitment to their roles. They all aim high for children and this helps to improve children's life chances.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Improve monitoring systems so that the manager has effective oversight of all aspects of the service.
- Review foster carer training records. Take action, where necessary, to ensure that foster carers complete mandatory training in a timely way.
- Give full reasons why children are placed with foster carers, to better reflect careful matching decisions.
- Include information about children's ethnicity, culture and religion in their

relevant plans. Furthermore, ensure that plans set out how foster carers will meet these needs.

- Ensure that health and safety documents are robust. Furthermore, ensure that panel and independent reviewing officers review health and safety documents in full when considering whether a person is suitable to be a foster carer.

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, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1)) In particular, that foster carers complete mandatory training in a timely way. Furthermore, that individual development plans prioritise which training foster carers need to complete and when.	30/06/2017
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. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b))	30/06/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that the foster home is in good order throughout. (NMS 10.2)

In particular, ensure that health and safety reviews contain sufficient information to establish that the foster home is safe. Furthermore, ensure that the panel takes account of all health and safety information to assist them in considering whether a person is suitable.

- Ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. In particular, the fostering service needs to record decisions about why children are placed with particular foster carers, to evidence careful matching processes. (NMS 11.2)
- Foster carers and fostering services should ensure that full attention is paid to the individual child's gender, faith, ethnic origin and linguistic background, sexual orientation and any disability they might have. Children should be encouraged and supported to have positive views of themselves and to be proud of their identity and heritage. (The Children Act 1989, guidance and regulations, volume 4: fostering services, page 21, paragraph 3.44)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children feel safe and well cared for in their foster families. Children's comments include, '[My carer] is the best person in the world,' and '[My carers] are kind, fair and helpful. They give me everything I need.' Children form trusted relationships with their foster carers and feel part of the family. Because of the care they receive, children thrive and make good progress. Examples of progress include becoming more confident, doing well at school, improved emotional well-being and making appropriate friendships. A social worker said: 'X is beginning to open up about his past – showing the strong bond that is developing. X's confidence has grown and [name of foster carer] is a good role model for him.'

The plan for most children within the service is to remain with their foster carers long-term. This gives them a sense of permanence and belonging; 48% of children have lived with their foster families for over two years. In the last two years, 14 children have remained with their foster carers on reaching adulthood. Plans for a further five children to remain with their foster families are under way. As a result, children enjoy stability and consistency in their lives. This commitment to children ensures that they are in a better position to manage when they move on to independence. When plans are not clear, managers challenge the placing authority to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of children.

Well planned introductions help children to settle in quickly. Children confirm that where possible they visit their new home before moving in and are welcomed into the family. Foster carers prepare a helpful booklet so that children get to know a little about them prior to meeting them. One foster carer wrote a letter to a child prior to them moving in, which is one example of child-centred practice.

Children enjoy a range of activities and holidays. Foster carers support children to develop hobbies and interests, such as cadets, horse-riding, scouts and film club. This gives children the chance to have fun, learn new skills, make friends and have different experiences that enrich their lives. Because of the progress they make, children now enjoy ordinary experiences such as sleepovers with their friends.

The fostering service recognises children's achievements. Individual children get a special mention in the agency's newsletter when they do well. An awards evening also celebrates children's successes. Doing well at school, brilliant reading and participating in a community project are just some of the triumphs which children have received rewards for. Praise and recognition promotes children's aspirations, confidence and self-worth.

Children contribute to the development of the service. They devise questions for panel members to ask foster care applicants. Children interview new staff members and so have their say about who works for the service. They also say what activities they would like to do, so when children said they wanted to have a party, they helped to organise a very successful Winter Ball!

Children express their views in a variety of ways. Supervising social workers see children as part of their support visits to foster carers. Children also contribute to their foster carer's annual review and to their own review meetings. As a result, children have a say in their day-to-day lives as well as in decisions about their future.

For children who do not live with their brothers and sisters, foster carers make arrangements so that they can see them regularly. Foster carers liaise well with social workers, other foster carers and birth families to make sure that visits are safe and positive. As a result, foster carers support children to maintain contact with people who are important to them. When children do not want to see their birth families, this is respected. This shows that children's individual wishes and feelings are taken into account.

Foster carers promote children's health and well-being. They ensure that children attend routine dentist and optician appointments. Foster carers receive reports following children's annual health assessments. This enables them to follow up on identified needs. Children access specialist support when necessary, and this supports their emotional well-being.

Children do well at school and some make exceptional progress. For example, one child's reading age has improved by five years. His teacher predicts that by the end of the year the child's reading age will be in line with his chronological age. By reading with the child most nights, the child's foster carers have contributed greatly to this success. After failing her mock exams, another child received tailored support. Because of this she went on to achieve six GCSEs at grades A*-C. A number of children have gone on to university, and remain with their foster carers during this time.

When extra support is needed, children can access grants through the fostering service. This enables them to receive additional tutoring, which supports their learning. Foster carers work closely with children's schools. One teacher writes: '[Name of foster carer] is incredibly supportive of the school. X's education is paramount along with her welfare. [Name of foster carer] supports homework and even had a session with staff to learn how to support X when revising for her exams.' Excellent educational support improves children's learning and life chances.

In the main, young people's placement plans outline their needs. Some plans do not include enough information about a child's religious, ethnic and cultural needs, and how these needs are being met. As a result, some young people are not fully supported with their identity.

When foster carers and children need to take a break, child-centred respite is provided. Short-break foster carers commit to providing a child with respite for at least two years. As a result, children enjoy consistent respite care, when needed, with people who become an extension of their foster family.

Managers and supervising social workers know their foster carers well. They

understand their strengths and skills in meeting the needs of particular children. As a result, the fostering service makes some very good matches based on sound judgements. However, records do not always explain the reasons why children are matched with particular foster carers. A recommendation is raised to improve record-keeping, so that documents clearly show how matching decisions are made.

Out of the 118 children living with foster carers over the past two years, ten of these placements came to an unplanned end. This is below average. When disruptions occur, the service looks at how they can prevent this from happening again. They challenge foster carers and seek an early review if they have concerns about their practice. Managers also challenge placing authorities when a lack of information contributes to a foster placement coming to an unplanned end. This shows that the agency learns from things that happen in an attempt to improve children's lives and experiences.

Foster carers experience timely and thorough assessments. Good preparation and assessment of foster carers ensures that they understand and meet children's needs. Foster carers report positively about the assessment process, including their attendance at the panel. A foster carer described their assessment as 'very detailed but fair'. Before being approved as a long-term foster carer, the service completes a permanence report. This prepares foster carers for the realities of caring for and committing to children through to adulthood. This focus contributes to the service being able to provide permanence for many children. Indeed 72% of children are in long-term placements, which provides children with consistency and security.

The majority of foster carers speak positively about the support they receive from their supervising social worker and managers. Comments from foster carers include:

- '[The support] is second to none.'
- 'The staff are excellent at all levels, nothing is too much trouble, very supportive. They support with all areas, even personal issues. I really do feel valued and appreciated.'
- 'Support is excellent, whoever I speak to is always able to assist me.'

Effective support enables foster carers to develop resilience. This helps them to cope with the demands of fostering on themselves and their families. Furthermore, it helps them to stick with children through difficult times.

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

Children's safety and well-being underpins all the fostering service's activities. Foster carers and staff understand their roles and responsibilities when it comes to keeping children safe. They report concerns appropriately and seek advice when necessary. Because of an open and transparent culture, staff and foster carers can raise issues with the registered manager. They do this confidently and in the knowledge that they will be listened to. Foster carers and staff know how to escalate concerns outside of the agency should they need to. This provides children with an extra layer of protection, should it be needed.

The fostering service takes allegations and concerns seriously and acts on them quickly. Social workers and managers liaise effectively with partner agencies. They also challenge partner agencies when their response is not robust. Managers reflect well on incidents. They challenge foster carers' practice, when necessary, to improve children's welfare and safety.

Children feel safe and secure in their foster families. Details about how they can complain are included in the children's guide to fostering. This booklet is available in different formats to make it accessible. Children receive a copy when they come to live with their foster carers. Supervising social workers see children on a regular basis and they also carry out unannounced visits. These measures enable children to access support and raise concerns. Furthermore, they help the agency to track children's well-being.

Risk assessments and safe-care plans largely outline specific risks for each child. They also include strategies to manage these risks. A well-coordinated response to risk helps to protect children from harm.

When children go missing, foster carers follow procedures. They link in well with partner agencies to ensure children's safe return. The service always requests that the placing authority completes a return interview with the young person. As a result, children have the opportunity to talk to someone independent of their foster family about why they went missing and what happened while they were away. This information can be useful to prevent further episodes.

The fostering service has specialist programmes that they use to work with young people to reduce risk. For example, some children have benefited from the 'Love Rocks' initiative. 'Love Rocks' educates children about a variety of issues, including what constitutes a healthy relationship, the issue of consent, online safety, and underage drinking and drug misuse. Because of the work she has done, one young person said that she now knows about grooming and how this can mean lots of different things. She said that she has changed her perspective on other people. She finds herself always questioning her relationships and thinking whether they are healthy and if they are worth her time. The 'Love Rocks' programme helps professionals to identify additional risks and vulnerabilities. Furthermore, it can be adapted to meet a child's individual needs. For example, the programme was translated into Polish so that a young person could access it. This excellent work informs risk management plans and helps to keep children safer.

'Prevent' duty training is firmly on the agenda for staff and for foster carers. This raises their awareness about radicalisation and extremism. It also helps them to understand and recognise how some children can be vulnerable to exploitation. As a result, the service is well placed to educate foster carers and young people to minimise risk.

Through training and support, the service equips foster carers to manage children's behaviour when it becomes challenging. They also respond well when things get tough. One foster carer said: 'There are increased visits when the young people present challenges and [we get] support with how to manage these challenges.' The

agency does not promote the use of restraint. Only two incidents of physical intervention have occurred in three years. Supervising social workers and managers reviewed both incidents and amended safe-care plans to prevent reoccurrence.

The introduction of a training course called Fostering Changes has been particularly well received by foster carers. Most carers have commented on how effective it has been in helping them to understand and manage children's behaviour. One foster carer said: 'Brilliant course. It has really made me think and look at my practice. It has definitely improved my practice. It helped me look at how I do things and offer alternatives. An example of this was changing the timing of some of the things I do, which gives me more time to spend with the young person when he comes in from school.' Another said: 'The support the course has given me has been excellent and although there are still difficult times, I manage these better.' This training programme is being rolled out to all foster carers. Effective behaviour management training increases placement stability. It helps foster carers to develop skills and resilience to support children well.

The fostering service adopts safer recruitment practice. Managers ensure that all necessary checks are completed on foster carers and staff. This prevents unsuitable people from working with children.

The fostering service uses different health and safety forms to assess the safety of foster homes during the fostering assessment and after a foster carer is approved. The two forms include different questions. As a result, some relevant health and safety matters are not reviewed after a foster carer is approved. Furthermore, the fostering panel does not see the full health and safety checklist, only a summary. Based on this, the panel cannot make a clear judgement about how safe a foster home is. This does not ensure that foster homes are safe for children to live in.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The fostering service is managed effectively by a suitably experienced manager. She registered with Ofsted in December 2016. She is currently undertaking her level 5 qualification in leadership and management. The registered manager has high expectations of herself and others. She is ambitious for children and this permeates throughout the organisation. Managers, staff and foster carers prioritise the needs of children. They also maintain high standards of care. This gives children the best chance to reach their potential.

Sufficient staffing means that supervising social workers have manageable caseloads. As a result, they have the time to offer meaningful support to foster carers. This contributes to placement stability. Staff receive regular supervision and have good training opportunities. This enables them to reflect on their practice and focus on their developmental needs. Individual staff take on responsibility for different areas of practice. As a result, they develop and share expertise. Knowledgeable and skilled staff ensure that foster carers and children receive good care and support. When necessary, managers challenge supervising social workers. This helps to maintain high standards and promotes safe practice.

The fostering service regularly assesses its work. Leaders and managers listen to the views of foster carers and children. These views inform the service's development plan. For example, the service is working hard to make training more accessible by introducing online training options. It is also looking at how to develop placement support. As a result, the service continually evolves in light of what its stakeholders say. A review of policies and procedures enhances the support and guidance given to foster carers. For example, a new procedure for the storage of medication in foster homes is being rolled out. Also, the out-of-hours support service is being reviewed so that it fits with what foster carers need. This shows a commitment to continued improvement.

Leaders and managers recognise the needs of children who require foster placements. As a result, they target their recruitment appropriately. The service provides foster families for children with complex and diverse needs. Furthermore, they provide good support for as long as it is required. This promotes children's well-being and improves their life chances.

Foster carers receive regular supportive supervision. This is well-documented and allows supervising social workers to review children's progress. This helps them to identify when things are going well and whether more support is needed. Supervision enables foster carers to have the time to reflect on their own practice and well-being. Developing strong working relationships with their supervisors enables foster carers to focus on the needs of the children.

All foster carers complete their training support and development standards within their first year of approval. A comprehensive training programme affords foster carers the opportunity to develop their skills. Not all foster carers complete their mandatory training in a timely way. As a result, they do not equip themselves with all of the knowledge and skills required. For example, at least ten fostering households have not completed first aid training and at least nine have yet to complete the safe administration of medication training. To date this has not directly compromised the safety and welfare of children, but it has the potential to do so. A lack of robust monitoring means that individual training plans do not prioritise what training foster carers need to complete and when.

Leaders and managers maintain some good monitoring systems. The registered manager has an excellent understanding of the progress of children. This enables her to tailor needs led support to each child and/or foster carer. It also provides her with the evidence to challenge placing authorities and foster carers when they are not acting in the best interests of children. The registered manager has strengthened some aspects of monitoring. A new system for tracking the response to missing episodes means that this is now very strong.

However, some aspects of quality assurance monitoring need to improve. Although supervising social workers check the administration of medication to children living with foster carers, the registered manager does not have a system to oversee this. Furthermore, the service does not use its electronic recording systems to pull information together. As a result, it is not easy to evaluate the overall impact of the fostering service on children's lives.

The fostering panel is diverse. Panel members bring a range of personal and professional experience. This informs their discussions and recommendations when considering assessments and foster carer reviews. The panel is largely robust in carrying out its quality assurance function. The agency's decision-maker makes decisions promptly and she clearly lists the reasons for her decisions. Training for panel members helps them to develop the skills and understanding relevant to their role.

Foster carers, staff and managers work well with partner agencies. Professionals report positively on the service children receive. Good communication and collaborative working promotes children's safety and welfare.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC040580

Registered provider: Barnardo's

Registered provider address: Barnardo's, Barnardo House, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG

Responsible individual: Nicola Williams

Registered manager: Rebecca Quigley

Telephone number: 0151 488 0822

Email address: nwfostering@barnados.org.uk

Inspectors

Jackie Line, social care inspector

Sarah Oldham, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2017