

West Midlands Family Placement

Barnardo's

Barnardo's, Brooklands, Great Cornbow, Halesowen B63 3AB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

West Midlands Family Placement was first registered in 2004. It is operated by Barnardo's, a national charitable organisation. The agency is based in Halesowen and has a smaller office in Nuneaton. It provides foster homes for children who need short-break foster care, mainstream foster care and also a specialist intensive service for children involved with the criminal justice system or at risk of child sexual exploitation. At the time of this inspection, there were 75 children living in 59 fostering households. The registered manager has been at the agency since 2015 and is a qualified social worker and experienced manager.

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 April 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 9 February 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This agency's child-focused approach has delivered consistently good outcomes for children over many years.

The agency provides good foster carer assessments, preparation, training and consistent social work support. This results in confident, skilful foster carers and a positive fostering experience for children. Foster carers, professionals and staff speak highly of the agency's impact on children's progress across all three specialisms.

An increasingly therapeutic and nurturing agency approach helps children to make sense of their earlier lives. The agency's social workers promote good standards of care. Foster carers also have direct support from the agency's consultant psychotherapist. Training and foster carer support groups are focused on children's needs.

Children benefit from creative direct work sessions and regular individual consultations about their views by the agency's two children's support workers. Children who have a disability have an equal opportunity to participate, give their views and enjoy the agency's leisure activities. Staff work cooperatively with parents of children having short-break foster care.

The combined help means that children overcome trauma, accept nurturing parenting, do better in school and learn to play. Their health, well-being, sleep and behaviour all improve.

Careful thinking about matching foster families with children results in children making good bonds with their foster carers. The agency helps children to maintain positive relationships with their families, according to their plans.

Many children make enduring connections and trust their foster carers. The agency has successfully helped many children to 'stay put' with their foster carers after the age of 18.

One local authority commissioner told Ofsted: 'This agency offers us probably the most stability in foster placements compared to any other. This evidences their good matching.'

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

Children become safer while living in foster care. Children get help when they are at risk of bullying, extremism or self-harm. They learn how to manage anxiety and make wise decisions because their self-esteem improves.

The agency provides a specialist, commissioned service to some children who are on

remand, at risk of involvement in 'county lines', of sexual exploitation and of going missing from care. Extensive placement support and skilful liaison with national and local partner organisations helps to protect children in such situations.

Staff and foster carers are carefully vetted. Frequent unannounced visits to foster homes are carried out and are combined with good risk management systems that help to make sure that children's care is safe.

In the majority of cases, safeguarding action by the agency is swift and effective. On a very few occasions, foster carers and agency social work staff have not had a clear understanding of the agency's child protection procedures. This has resulted in some delay. However, there is no evidence that children's safety has been compromised.

Commissioners of services, particularly for children at high risk, are entirely positive about the service provided and the difference it has made in helping to protect them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Since the last inspection, this agency has incorporated two of the organisation's other fostering agencies, under the oversight of the original manager. The agency now has a larger group of staff and foster carers, more managers and more children in placement. It has also expanded its remit of types of placements.

Barnardo's ethical approach sets an ambitious vision, with high expectations for what all children can achieve. However, systematic managerial monitoring and action have not been fully effective in improving the service.

Clear formal matching documentation and reports about children's progress are still not fully developed. Managers have not always ensured that concerns about children's well-being are concluded and lessons learned. They do not ensure that all foster carers in a household have received the agency's core training expectation. This is particularly in relation to post-approval child protection training.

Managers have not always identified and acted on differences between the three new teams, in relation to the quality of children's risk assessment, foster carer assessment and review.

The management team is aware of these issues and is working on improving consistency across the agency. These issues have not had an impact on the care that children receive.

Relationships with partner agencies and with staff and foster carers are good. They feel part of a professional team. The fostering panel fulfils its responsibilities well. The decision-making process about foster carer suitability is rigorous and provides an effective gatekeeping function in relation to maintaining good-quality standards.

Foster carers and children benefit from a consistent and stable staff group.

Professional support and supervision are regular and helpful. Workloads are manageable. A good range of training is available. Social work staff and foster carers feel well trained and well able to support the children they care for.

Placing authority social workers and commissioners and foster carers have confidence in the child-centred attitude of this provider. They have a positive view about the care received by all children, including those who face significant challenges. One commissioner described this open, resourceful approach as, 'They won't shut the door – they keep trying.'

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 provider must implement a written policy which sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12(1)(b))	19/07/2019
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))	30/11/2019
This relates to ensuring that consistent good standards across the service are sustained.	

Recommendations

- Ensure a clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 20)
This relates to evaluating the effectiveness of the agency's framework for core training expectations and foster carers take-up.
- Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: National Minimum Standards', 25.2)

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: SC042455

Registered provider: Barnardo's

Registered provider address: Unit 13A Silver Fox Way, Cobalt Business Park,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE27 0QJ

Responsible individual: Jacqueline Bazley

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Inspectors

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