

Barnardo's East Midlands Family Placement Service

Barnardo's Midlands Regional Office
The Old Exchange, 21 Nottingham Road, Spondon, Derby DE21 7NF
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's East Midlands Family Placement Service is an independent fostering agency. It is one of a number of services operated by Barnardo's, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

It provides long-term, short-term, emergency, short-break and parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, 34 children were in placement and there were 29 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 November 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding

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: 8 June 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. This is due to excellent placement stability and care of the highest quality.
- Children are extremely happy and settled in their foster families. They have exceptionally positive experiences and feel part of the foster carers' families.
- Children are kept as safe as possible because foster carers and staff have a good understanding of safeguarding issues and their roles and responsibilities. This has its basis in good-quality, relevant and up-to-date training.
- Foster carers provide an excellent standard of care and support. They know the children exceptionally well and have very positive relationships with children in their care.
- Foster carers are thoroughly assessed prior to their approval. Their skills are then enhanced by excellent research-based training, high-quality supervision and regular support.
- Leaders and managers are inspirational and aspire to provide a service of the highest quality to children and foster carers. They promote a culture of positivity and creativity.
- All staff are exceptionally child focused. They are well supported by the managers to work to the best of their abilities.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Barnardo's must re-evaluate its current policy in relation to some aspects of staff recruitment to ensure that this is consistent with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

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
(1) The fostering service provider must not (a) employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless the person is fit to do so. (3) For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person (a) is of integrity and good character, (b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform, (c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. Regulation (20(1)(3)(a)(b)(c) This relates to when a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, verification, as far as practicable, of why the employment or position ended.	04/01/2019

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make exceptional progress as a result of stable, long-term placements that meet their needs. Placement stability has a massively positive impact on children's outcomes and experiences of family life. Of the children currently in foster placements, 94% have lived with their foster carers for over a year, and 70% have lived with their carers for over two years, including children who have lived with their carers for significantly longer, for example 13 years.

Unplanned endings are rare, and when a placement has to end this is done in a way that minimises any disruption. Short breaks are used to support placements when this is necessary for placement stability. This is done in a focused and creative way to minimise any sense of rejection that a child might experience. For example, one foster carer wrote a daily note to the foster child for him to read every day. Staying put is also well established and a number of young people remain with their foster carers once they reach 18 years of age. This makes a significant positive contribution to their future life chances, their self-esteem and their general well-being.

Children benefit from extremely high-quality care and support. The agency promotes a therapeutic parenting approach that is underpinned by a strong research base. This enables carers to see beyond a child's behaviour and understand the reasons for it, resulting in far more positive relationships and more empathetic care. Carers know the children exceptionally well. They can read their non-verbal communication and are highly attuned to their needs. A child's social worker commented: 'This agency has made a significant difference. The child has changed from being a sad and angry little boy. He is now happy, outgoing and has gained in confidence and self-esteem. The foster carers have done an excellent job.'

Children have very positive relationships with their foster carers. One child described her foster carers as 'perfect, fun and strict'. Children say that there is nothing they would like to change, and that they like 'everything'. Children are very much a part of foster carers' families. Some choose to call their carers 'mum' and 'dad' and do not want to be seen as children looked after. They experience all aspects of family life, including holidays, outings and family events. They are treated as if they were the carers' birth children, while still maintaining a positive sense of their own identity.

Children's school attendance is excellent, with 92% of children achieving over 95% attendance in the last academic year. This, along with their attainment, is monitored by the manager on a regular basis to ensure that any additional support is available if needed. One young person has high yet realistic aspirations for herself and will be going to university. Other children have settled better in school, have fewer incidents of isolation and exclusion and are catching up with their targets. Foster carers support this totally. One education representative commented: 'This is the best carer I have worked with in terms of communication and relationships with

school. The change in the young person is significant and extremely positive.'

Foster carers promote children's health, both physical and psychological, and well-being to a very high degree. They attend multidisciplinary meetings and implement strategies to improve children's emotional well-being. Family contact is also supported well so that children maintain a positive sense of their own identity.

Children are encouraged to develop their social and life skills through engaging in a variety of activities such as swimming, drama, girl guides and army cadets. This helps them make friends, builds their confidence and self-esteem and helps them to feel part of the wider community. The agency has an effective partnership with a local arts theatre and this also provides children with plenty of opportunities to develop their creative talents.

Foster carers help children become more independent, both practically and emotionally. A social worker said of a young person: 'She has made fabulous progress. She has developed curiosity and she is not afraid because the foster carer has given her a secure base.' All achievements are celebrated in a number of ways. Children are mentioned in the newsletter, they receive a letter or certificate, and they are given a voucher.

Foster carers are extremely strong advocates for their foster children. Carers know the children exceptionally well and understand their needs and wishes. This ensures that children's plans are progressed in a child-focused way, with support from the agency as needed. One child said: 'They know how I am feeling because they just know me, and I tell them.'

Children are placed locally, ensuring that they can maintain important relationships, continue to attend their schools and are not subject to too many changes in their lives. The agency also works with commissioners to try and facilitate placements of brothers and sisters near to each other so that contact is easy.

Children's views and experiences are given the highest priority. This has been enhanced since the last inspection by the appointment of a project worker, whose role is to promote children's engagement and participation, as well as undertake some individual direct work. This has included life story work, which has been extremely beneficial in enabling children to understand their histories and move on with their futures. The project worker has also helped young people develop independent living skills in a structured and planned way.

Children have contributed their views to the development of the feedback form. They also have a big say in the choice of the social activities provided by the agency. Children have written questions for the fostering panel to ask foster carer applicants. The sons and daughters of foster carers are also included in participation events and have their own activity days as a thank you for their contribution to the fostering household.

When children have complained, this has been managed very well. Complaints have been taken seriously, responded to quickly and resolved to the satisfaction of everyone. One child said: 'Barnardo's has been awesome.'

Foster carers receive a warm, prompt and friendly welcome when they contact this

agency. Carers comment that they like the family feel and the consistency of staff. Foster carers are very well prepared for the fostering task. The assessments are very thorough and analytical, and any concerns are addressed rigorously. This ensures that only those people who have the capacity to meet the needs of fostered children are approved. A recent team practice development day was used to discuss how to improve assessments, partly as a result of learning from a complaint. Mid-way reviews provide the opportunity for the social worker to discuss any issues with the team manager, and for the team manager to monitor the progress of the assessment. Timescales are adhered to, ensuring that foster carers are approved in a timely way, in line with government guidelines. The agency's policies in relation to new partners and carers 'on hold' have recently been improved to provide greater clarity and consistency.

Matching is an exceptionally well-considered process. The agency is particularly committed to ensuring that the best match is made, and the agency will only place children with carers who have the skills to meet the child's needs. Carers are under no pressure to accept a placement if they are unsure about their abilities. Where possible, placements are planned and include introductions to the foster family prior to the child moving in. The agency does all it can to provide foster carers with as much information about the child as possible so that they can make an informed decision. A child's social worker commented about a recent match, saying: 'There was a good coordinated introduction. The planning was excellent, and this played a great part in the child settling in.' Children are provided with lovely welcome bags on placement. This includes the children's guide as well as small gifts to help them settle.

The support available to foster carers and the quality of training are excellent. This enables foster carers to support the children to the best of their abilities and ensures that children have good outcomes. For example, a reflect group with access to a psychotherapist has been implemented recently. A foster carer described this support as 'amazing'.

All the foster carers have completed the training, support and development standards, and they also have access to an improved and relevant training programme to enhance their skills and knowledge. This includes topics such as foetal alcohol syndrome, non-violent restraint and emotional resilience and well-being. The expectations regarding training have been increased in the last year, from two courses to three courses a year. This enhances the skills and knowledge of foster carers.

Supervision is regular, supportive, child focused and challenging when necessary. Foster carers have described their supervising social workers as 'excellent'. They feel respected, valued and part of the professional team around the child. One foster carer said: 'I couldn't want for any more. The training and support are fantastic. I couldn't have done it without him.' Supervising social workers know the children very well and this enables them to give the foster carers appropriate advice and guidance.

Foster carer reviews are timely and thorough, and this has been enhanced by the appointment of an independent reviewing officer since the last inspection. This provides an additional tier of objectivity and an independent person for foster carers

to talk to if they have any issues that they wish to raise. Requests for feedback from schools have also been implemented to enhance the information available to the reviewing officer. This has proved to be very successful.

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

The stability of children's placements plays a significant part in keeping children safe from harm. Currently, no children are engaged in risk-taking behaviour such as going missing from their foster homes, being involved in criminal activities or drug and alcohol misuse. Children who previously have been missing from care no longer do so. A child's social worker said: 'This is a good placement. The risk-taking behaviour has decreased most definitely.' Supervising social workers and foster carers are very clear about how to respond to children who go missing from placement and each child has an individual risk assessment and protocol to follow, should this occur.

The agency ensures that children's risks are identified, documented and reviewed. These inform safer caring plans and risk management strategies that enable foster carers to keep children as safe as possible. Foster carers also have training in how to manage behaviour, as well as training to help them understand the underlying causes of behaviour that challenges. Restraint is rarely used; however, if it is used, it is recorded, reported and monitored by managers.

Barnardo's places a high priority on safeguarding and there are a number of reporting and monitoring mechanisms at senior management level within the organisation to provide an additional tier of managerial oversight and advice for the more serious incidents.

Supervising social workers and foster carers benefit from good-quality training in all aspects of safeguarding, including the risks from radicalisation and extremism. The team manager ensures that training is updated and relevant and has included training in gangs, culture and county lines as part of the upcoming programme.

The manager, supervising social workers and foster carers understand their responsibilities if a safeguarding allegation occurs. The agency has demonstrated that it responds appropriately to allegations against carers, providing information promptly to the child's local authority and designated officer while ensuring that the carer has independent support. The fostering panel is informed about any allegations, following an early review, so that it can make a recommendation about a foster carer's ongoing suitability to foster.

Foster carers, staff and panel members are recruited safely. However, Barnardo's has a policy of only seeking employment checks for the previous five years. This is not fully consistent with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, which require verification of why any employment with children or vulnerable adults ended 'as far as reasonably practicable'.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A well-established, highly experienced and suitably qualified manager provides inspirational leadership. She, along with the team manager, is aspirational for the

children and has clear and realistic plans to continue to develop the service.

The manager demonstrates a deep desire to learn from feedback to improve the service. More formal consultation with foster carers has been recently introduced as a result of feedback. There are now regular 'meet the managers' sessions, to enable foster carers to air their views face to face. Foster carers' views are also canvassed when any changes are introduced, such as the improved recording of medication and electronic carer recording. Proposed changes are highlighted in regular newsletters to facilitate information sharing and consultation.

This agency is exceptionally child focused. An external professional said: 'Barnardo's is amazing.' This was echoed by a foster carer, who commented: 'All staff are very invested and interested in the children and that is at the heart of everything they do.'

Very thorough and effective monitoring systems ensure that managers have an excellent understanding of the progress children are making as well as compliance with regulations. The internal monitoring systems provide the basis for a very thorough and analytical report, which clearly shows an excellent understanding of the strengths and shortfalls of the service and a desire for continuous improvement. Clear lines of accountability and reporting structures ensure that senior managers and trustees are also fully informed and have excellent oversight of the agency, enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities.

Staff are supported extremely well. They have regular supervision which takes account of their developmental needs as well as case-related decisions. It allows time for reflection as well as challenge. Staff have access to excellent training to enhance their skills, such as dyadic developmental psychotherapy, developmental trauma and a five-day fostering changes course, all of which is underpinned by social learning and attachment theory. This enhances the support, supervision and training that they can give to foster carers.

Partnership working is a strength. There are extremely positive relationships with children's social workers and commissioners. One commissioner said: 'They are a pleasure to work with. They are very child centred.' A social worker commented: 'The agency is child focused and provides excellent training and support for its foster carers. The agency has good and effective communication, providing regular reports and updates.'

The manager meets regularly with commissioners to discuss the needs of the local authorities as well as to raise issues. There is clear evidence of challenge when this is required. In one instance, excellent communication between a commissioner and the agency resulted in a very positive outcome for a young person, as the local authority was able to access some additional money to provide a service that improved the young person's well-being significantly.

The fostering panel provides an effective quality assurance function. It is well chaired by an experienced and skilled panel chair and its members offer a range of personal and professional experience. Excellent administration enables the panel members to have time to fully consider assessments and reviews. This assists the fostering panel to make sound, well-considered recommendations to the agency decision-maker. As a result of learning from a serious case review, foster carer

reviews are now brought back to the panel for their consideration every three years.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. The annual service day has a particular focus on this, although it is threaded throughout the agency and all its work. Staff and the panel members have recently had training in gender identity to enable them to give better consideration to the needs of transgender carers and children and the implications for practice.

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 differences 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 whom 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: SC044607

Registered provider: Barnardo's Midlands Regional Office

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

Responsible individual: Nicola Williams

Registered manager: Tracey Easter

Telephone number: 01332 544711

Email address: tracey.easter@barnardos.org.uk

Inspector

Ros Chapman: social care regulatory inspector



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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>

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