

Bridging Gaps Fostering Agency

Bridging Gaps Limited

Norwich Union House, 9 Mackenzie Street, Slough SL1 1XQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency offers foster placements to children on a planned or emergency basis for short- and long-term durations, bridging and for short breaks. The service also offers placements for brother and sister groups and for parents and their babies.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 45 registered families caring for 74 children.

Inspection dates: 7 to 11 April 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: 3 October 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive exceptional care from warm and committed foster carers. Children feel well cared for and part of the family and speak positively about their experiences with their carers. As a result of this, children thrive and make exceptional progress. Children's relationships with their carers often continue after they have moved on from the home. This reflects the family-like ethos of the agency.

Foster carers value education highly. They ensure that the children they care for receive the best opportunities. As a result, all children access education, whether this is through school, college, apprenticeships or home tuition. Foster carers and staff have strong relationships with education professionals. When children need extra support, foster carers advocate for this and ensure that the children receive what they need. This supports children to make meaningful progress and achieve their potential.

Foster carers work with a range of professionals to influence positive outcomes in children's health. For example, one unaccompanied asylum-seeking child arrived in the country with many health challenges and was able to receive the necessary treatment because of the foster carer's commitment to the child's health. This has had a positive and long-lasting impact on the child's general health.

Children who need support with their emotional and mental health receive excellent care. Children have access to therapeutic support, and foster carers and staff receive therapeutic training to support children.

A significant strength of the agency is its ability to educate children on issues such as mental health and emotional regulation. The children fully engage in this and their feedback is highly positive.

Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are fully considered by foster carers, staff and the agency as a whole in all aspects of their care. There are many opportunities for children to give feedback. For example, staff consult children on the development of the agency, and children can see the outcome of this consultation. This enables the children to feel valued and respected.

An additional strength of the agency is the ability of foster carers to prepare children for independence, for example by teaching children the language, skills and culture that will enable them to live independently. The foster carers do this exceptionally well, with an effective programme in place. Foster carers' support to young people who have left their care is considerable. One young person said of his former foster carer, 'If I can be just 20% of how she is, then this will be good.'

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

Staff and foster carers have an in-depth understanding of the risks that children face, and they are effective in managing these risks. Children have individual risk management plans that reflect their needs. Staff update risk assessments as needed and ensure that they reflect changes and any newly identified risks. Foster carers have a strong understanding of keeping children safe online. For example, one carer instils clear boundaries for children by making internet access unavailable at certain times, and ensuring that there are parental blocks that prevent access to social media and any inappropriate sites. This foster carer discusses this with the children and works positively with them around keeping safe online.

Foster carers help children to grow in confidence and they encourage children to explore who they want to be. As a result, one child, who had previously been dissuaded from a career in fashion, is now pursuing their desire to study in this area. All children who spoke to the inspector said that they receive the support and encouragement to pursue the life and career that they want. This includes careers in business and entrepreneurship.

One care leaver said that they had felt safe when they were placed with their carers. This young person had previously been homeless and was immediately safer in the foster home. They were well cared for and reassured by the carer. The young person continues to have a significant relationship with the carers, as well as the other children in the home. This has enabled the young person to think positively about their long-term future.

Foster carers ensure that safeguarding is paramount and that professional boundaries are not blurred. All staff and carers receive training in safeguarding and trauma. They all know how to respond to children in a way that is caring and supportive. The language that staff and carers use is consistently caring and child focused.

Foster carers have a sound understanding of the procedures to follow when a child goes missing from home. They work effectively with a range of professionals to ensure that the child returns home safely. Foster carers understand the impact of trauma on children's sense of self and are responsive to children's reaction to trauma. For example, one carer used their knowledge and skills to seek medical support for a child who was harming themselves. This ensured the safety of the child, and the child felt as though they were being cared for as a member of the family.

The agency has a strong dedication to securing the status of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. There is a commitment to supporting children's mental health and the impact that uncertainty can have on this.

Safer recruiting is thorough. The effective processes in place ensure that staff are safely recruited. Checks are robust, clear and well organised and show strong attention to detail.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers show a high level of ambition for the children in their care. They also have high expectations of their staff and foster carers. Leaders and managers show skill in evaluating their work and gathering feedback and they understand the progress that children are making. As a result, they set realistic targets to drive continuous improvement.

Leaders and managers understand the importance of continuous learning and development. They promote professional development and encourage staff and carers to complete training that will make a difference to the lives of children. All staff have completed training around trauma. This includes the administrator and referrals worker. This ensures that they know how to talk about trauma with referrers and other external professionals. Succession planning is of a high standard. For example, one member of staff has achieved a leadership and management qualification.

Staff speak highly of the support that they receive. Supervisions sessions are regular and of a high standard. They are reflective and allow time for continued growth and development. Inductions are of a good standard and newly qualified social workers receive excellent support.

Leaders and managers lead by example and model the level of care needed for children. They seek support from relevant professionals and advocate strongly for the children who need their immigration status to be determined.

Leaders and managers have significant links in the community, ensuring that children have access to those who have influence. This has led to the agency achieving a range of community awards for its innovative practice and support to children and young people. For example, the end of year awards celebration includes local dignitaries and community leaders.

Managerial monitoring of the service is effective. Leaders and managers understand the agency's strengths and weaknesses and work to address these. This is demonstrated in the improvement of the panel process since the last inspection.

The response to the recommendations from the last inspection has been considerable. However, leaders and managers have not ensured that the quality-of-service reviews or updates of the statement of purpose have been shared with the regulator. These are missed opportunities for the provider to showcase the improvements that they have made to the service.

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— keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide, notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, (Regulation 4 (a)(b))	30 May 2025
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 purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2)) In particular, ensure that written reports are shared with the Chief Inspector routinely.	30 May 2025

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: SC390755

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Registered provider address: Norwich Union House, 9 Mackenzie Street, Slough
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Responsible individual: Zaneb Khan

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Inspector

Vevene Muhammad, Social Care Inspector

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