

Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency

Birmingham Children's Trust Limited
1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, West Midlands B4 7DJ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency was registered on 19 March 2018. The agency was formerly part of the Birmingham City Council and since April 2018 is part of Birmingham Children's Trust.

The agency offers mainstream, short- and long-term, emergency, parent and child and 'connected persons' placements.

There are 462 currently approved fostering households, of which 376 are mainstream foster carers, 74 are 'connected persons' (or 'family and friends'), 11 offer an emergency duty service and one, a parent and child service.

There are 646 children placed with the agency.

Inspection dates: 21 to 25 January 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
---	--

How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
---	---------------------------------

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

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The agency is not yet tracking children's progress from the point of placement across all areas of their development or monitoring the difference that fostering makes to children's lives.
- Supervising social workers do not always ensure that children's plans for contact with their family are in place.
- Managers do not ensure that the right processes are followed when making decisions about children sharing bedrooms.
- Children do not get information about their prospective foster placements in formats that are helpful to them.
- The matching of children to their foster carers is sometimes not recorded in a way that makes the rationale for decisions clear.
- Managers do not always ensure that the voice of the child is evidenced in children's records.
- Managers do not always ensure that foster carer reviews and/or unannounced visits are completed within required timescales.
- Some foster carers' mandatory training is incomplete or out of date.
- Managers do not have sufficient oversight of foster carers who are subject to performance action plans.
- Managerial oversight of allegations does not always ensure that conclusions from allegations about foster carers are notified to them or that lessons are learned.
- Ofsted does not always receive safeguarding notifications in the timescale set out in regulations.
- Managers do not ensure that reapproval decisions are clearly recorded.
- Some aspects of safe recruitment practice are not sufficiently robust.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Most children live in settled and secure foster placements.
- Young adults benefit from being able to stay put with their previous foster carers.
- Social workers are enthusiastic about their work.
- Social workers receive good-quality training and professional supervision.
- Foster carers feel well supported by their supervising social workers.

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
<p>Ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times, and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with a foster parent due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings. (Regulation 11 (a)(b))</p> <p>This relates to implementing the child's placement plan, and ensuring placement matching and success.</p>	31/07/2019
<p>Provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This relates to foster carer completion of core training and action plans and children's current health and placement plans.</p>	31/07/2019
<p>Review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation. (Regulation 28 (1))</p> <p>This is in respect of completing annual reviews within a 12-month cycle and getting the views of any placing social worker who has placed a child with foster carers.</p>	31/07/2019
<p>Maintain a case record for each foster parent approved by them which must include copies of the documents specified in paragraph (2) and the information specified in paragraph (3). (Regulation 30 (1)(2)(a-f))</p>	31/07/2019
<p>Ensure that the system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (3))</p> <p>This is in respect of the report of the review of the quality of care.</p>	31/07/2019

<p>Ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36 (1))</p> <p>This relates to notification 'without delay' and the outcome of any child protection enquiry.</p>	<p>31/07/2019</p>
---	-------------------

Recommendations

- Ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.3)
- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 4.5) In particular, make sure that safe care plans effectively detail and identify how to reduce children's key risks. Ensure that foster carers have these plans when they need them.
- Ensure that, before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 10.6)
- Ensure that the foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 10.5)
- Ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers have full information about the child. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 11.2)
- Ensure that, unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 11.3)
- Demonstrate, including from written records, that the agency consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 19.2)
- Ensure that the foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 26.7)
- Ensure that children are cared for in line with their Placement Plan. ('Fostering

Services: National Minimum Standards', 31)

- Ensure that decision-making about exemptions is both transparent and consistent. (Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, July 2013, page 17)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The trust is in its first year of operation. Although leaders and managers have taken initial steps to increase managerial oversight of the agency, there are weaknesses across all aspects of the service. Managers often do not have a full understanding of the children's individual journeys as a result of living in foster care. For example, managers do not have a coordinated monitoring system to help them fully assess the difference that foster carers make to children's lives. This is a missed opportunity to celebrate children's successes, to understand children's levels of progress and to ensure that children's needs are safeguarded.

Work between the supervising social workers and children's social workers sometimes fails to ensure that children's care plans progress without delay. This is further hampered by foster carers and supervising social workers not working together to deliver the aims of a child's placement plan. For example, supervising social workers are not always aware of the detail of children's health needs or about foster carers' skills to meet these specific needs. Supervising social workers do not always know or ensure that foster carers complete actions set out in a child's statutory review, such as ensuring that they facilitate family contact. This can compromise the oversight of foster carers' abilities in meeting children's diverse needs.

Despite the trust having a support and inclusion service for children in care from the children's rights and participation service, the fostering agency has not yet used it to benefit children in foster care effectively. This is a missed opportunity for children to play an important role in the review of the quality of care and in service planning.

Prior to moving into foster care, children are not provided with accessible information that reflects their age and understanding. This means they do not get to know about their potential foster carer, where they will sleep and what they can expect from living in foster care.

Decisions are often made without children being consulted. For example, despite children having good ideas about how to improve their respite arrangements, these suggestions go unheard. Similarly, children bring up good ideas about improving the way they get to see their birth families. These are not followed up. Some of the children told the inspectors that not being able to have a key to their home made them feel that their foster carers do not trust them. For instance, one child told an inspector that his foster carer was happy to leave a key under a plant pot rather than trusting him to hold his own key.

Decisions in relation to when children can share a bedroom with other unrelated children are poorly recorded. Assessments miss out key information such as children's wishes, their needs and vulnerabilities and/or their right to dignity and privacy.

More positively, the trust's therapeutic service provides a valued support to the fostering service. As a result, children receive therapeutic and emotional support to overcome past trauma. The therapeutic service offers a training programme to supervising social workers and foster carers that helps them to increase their skills in applying a therapeutic approach to care.

Children who have a disability thrive in foster care. This is because they benefit from foster carers who are knowledgeable about their needs. Partnership work with health professionals has resulted in the launch of a new health passport. Foster carers can use this record to keep information about a child's health needs up to date.

All children have school placements. The virtual school and the corporate parenting team have worked with foster carers at events to improve children's opportunities for personal growth, enjoyment and achievement. However, the impact of this joined-up work has not yet been evaluated by the agency. This is a missed opportunity to measure the successes children are making in their learning and personal development.

Children who wish to stay with their foster carers into young adulthood can achieve this through the agency applying the 'staying put' arrangements. The number of children who have benefited from these arrangements managed by the agency is above the national average. These arrangements provide a growing number of children with long-term stability in their life.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Relatively few children go missing from care. Despite this, the agency's records do not always capture the range of risks children may face. For example, children's safe care plans are often overly generic and not individualised. This means that risks specific to individual children are not evaluated. When concerns about children's vulnerability have been raised, at times the action taken by supervising social workers has been too slow. This means that the management of risk that has the potential to cause harm is not swiftly escalated or managed.

Managers in the agency have failed to identify that some foster carers have not received the required safeguarding training, including training regarding the potential risks children face from radicalisation.

When allegations are made about a foster carer, managers work well with child protection professionals and police during investigations. However, managers do not provide foster carers with a conclusion summary after the investigation has been completed. Consequently, following the investigation of allegations there is no clear record that helps the agency and the foster carers improve their practice. Outcomes of child protection enquiries are not always notified to Ofsted. This leaves the regulator unclear about what has happened and so the required degree of external oversight is absent.

Safe recruitment of staff is not fully effective. For example, different types of records are used to capture recruitment checks. This creates confusion. This shortfall has the potential for unsuitable adults to have contact with children.

Foster carers act quickly when children are at risk of being bullied. This swift intervention helps children to know that people do care about them and will protect them.

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

The trust came into operation in April 2018 and inherited many of the challenges from the local authority.

Although managers collate data relating to the fostering agency, they do not analyse this data to monitor and improve practice. For example, managers have not analysed the impact of the emergency duty system on the number of moves that children experience.

Managers do not ensure that all foster carers receive their unannounced visit each year. This prevents them having sufficient oversight of foster carers' quality of care over time.

Most children benefit from living in stable placements. However, the agency's records do not show how well children are matched to their new foster carers. This deficit includes not demonstrating how decisions are made about existing children in placement, the foster carers' approval categories, and whether they have the training and skill profile to meet the child's identified needs. As a result, managers cannot always be assured that decisions made about vulnerable children are based on appropriate rationale and in the child's best interest.

The current foster carer population is ageing but is otherwise a reasonable reflection of the diversity of children's cultural and religious backgrounds.

Panel members have a wide range of skills and experience. Agency decision-makers are experienced senior managers within the trust. The summary record of the panel's recommendations and the agency decisions at approval and review are not sufficiently focused on outcomes for children and the core responsibilities of the fostering agency. Decision-making about exemptions to the usual number of unrelated children who can live in one fostering household are not made by someone independent of the fostering agency.

Approximately 85% of foster carers achieve the nationally recognised training and development standards within required timescales. However, foster carers do not always complete the agency's core training. Managers acknowledge that they do not currently track foster carer development. This includes failing to assure themselves that performance action plans to address concerns over practice have been followed through and completed satisfactorily. Delays in foster carer annual reviews also

mean that the agency does not have an accurately informed or timely evaluation of the quality of foster carer practice.

Supervising social workers are enthusiastic about their work. The trust ensures that staff working within the agency receive good-quality training and professional supervision.

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: 1273591

Registered provider: Birmingham Children's Trust Limited

Registered provider address: Third Floor Zone 16, 1 Lancaster Circus,
Birmingham B4 7DJ

Responsible individual: Theresa Kane

Registered manager: Michelle Gardiner

Telephone number: 0121 303 7575

Email address: fosteringservices@birmingham.co.uk

Inspectors

Christy Wannop, social care inspector

Dawn Bennett, social care inspector

Tracey Coglean Greig, 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 2019