

Anglia Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC406969
Inspection date	26/01/2015
Inspector	Clive Lucas
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Drayton Old Lodge, 146 Drayton High Road, Norwich, Norfolk, NR8 6AN
Telephone number	01603861611
Email	Info@afafostering.com
Registered person	Anglia Fostering Agency Ltd
Registered manager	Graeme Charles Duncombe
Responsible individual	Nigel John Pickering
Date of last inspection	24/02/2012

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency has its office base in Norfolk and a sub office in the east Midlands. It recruits, trains and supports foster carers across East Anglia and the East of England region. The agency provides a range of placements for all age groups, including short, medium and long term care and permanency. It also provides therapeutic placements and parent and child placements. They have 53 fostering households providing placements for 66 children and young people.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Overall, the agency provides a good standard of care with very high level of outcomes for children and young people. Notably they make exceptional progress in education. Some have plans for further education and going to university which they are looking forwards to. This is helped by carers providing stable placements and working well with schools to ensure that children's education is given a high profile.

Children and young people feel safe in their placements and have their needs met well by carers who receive good training and a high level of support. Although training has not always been provided in a sufficiently timely manner. The support provided to carers is available at all times of the day and night and this helps to maintain stable placements. Some records, including records of supervision are not

always sufficiently clear. This is something that the agency are aware of and have plans to address. There is effective monitoring of the functioning of the agency to help drive improvement. The vast majority of cares are very happy with the agency. There have been a few complaints and these have identified some shortfalls, but the agency have accepted this and taken action to address these issues and improve their practice. Records of complaints are not kept in a way that makes monitoring them easy. Children know about making complaint's, but the younger version of the children's guide does not cover this well enough.

There are good relationships with commissioners and other agencies, including safeguarding agencies. This helps to ensure that children and young people are kept safe and have their individual needs met. There is good matching of children with carers to ensure that children live in homes where they can do well.

There is a Registered Manager who is appropriately experienced and qualified. He does not receive professional supervision to help him reflect on practice. Staff are appropriately qualified and receive good training. The agency provides some specialist placements and the carers are well prepared and supported for this, so that they can provide good care for children and young people who have specific needs. Commissioners are happy with the services provided by the agency.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
17 (2011)	ensure that foster carers are provided with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. This relates to timeliness of training (Regulation 17(1))	24/04/2015
3 (2011)	ensure that the children's guide contains a summary of the complaints procedure. (Regulation 3(3)(b))	24/04/2015

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that there are supervision meetings which have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills (NMS 21.8)

- ensure that suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person (NMS 24.3)
- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future (NMS 26.6)
- ensure that records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. This relates to complaints records being easily found and monitored. (NMS 2.11)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Children and young people make exceptional progress in their education as a result of the work that foster carers and the agency do to support them. Schools are very positive about the progress that children and young people make while living with carers from the agency. They describe very significant increases in attendance and achievement which they feel are due to the security that children and young people feel in their placements. Young people also speak very highly about the way they are supported to do well in their education. Some have plans for their further education and speak of being very excited about the chance of going to university. When children and young people move placements they are supported to stay at their current schools if this is in their best interests. This provides them with some stability and consistency while they settle into new foster homes.

Some young people are placed in specialist therapeutic (ITF) placements. They are looked after by carers who are well trained and who have a high level of support. Consequently, some children and young people are able to live and remain in placements which they may otherwise not be able to manage. This gives them the valuable opportunity to experience family life and also to receive the therapeutic input they require to meet their needs. Other young people have their health needs met by the foster carers working with other agencies such as therapeutic services or Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Most children and young people live in stable placements which meet their needs very well. One placing social worker had commented that 'carers were able to meet (the child's) needs which helped identify further areas of support required and helped with his re-integration back into his family.' The agency does not currently have any staying put placements for young people aged 18 or over. This is due to the age range of their current placements. However, one young person who is approaching 18 said that she has been in her placement for a number of year and feels supported and well cared for. She is confident in her opportunity to remain in a secure placement with her carers while she completes her education and goes to university.

Children and young people are able to give their view on the foster placements and

the agency. They are regularly spoken to by placement managers who support and supervise the foster carers. They are also consulted as part of foster carer annual reviews. There is a young person's consultation group which have been actively involved in developing resources such as the children's guide and leaflets on bullying. They are also working on questions to ask prospective new staff in interview. This helps to ensure that the information which is provided for young people is relevant and understandable.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Most carers speak very highly of the support which they receive from the agency. Very few carers have made complaints about the support that they have received while they were subject to safeguarding investigations. Others have said that they were well supported through such processes. The agency have learnt from a complaint and have now made pro-active arrangements to provide independent support when it may be needed. Carers report very active support from the agency at all times of day and night. They say that this allows them to continue to look after children and young people through difficult times. The level and quality of support helps to keep children in stable placements and to have their needs, including the need to be safeguarded, considered even when incidents happen outside of office hours.

Carers receive supervision from their placement managers. In some cases for ITF carers there has been on occasion a lack of clarity over supervision frequency as they have therapeutic supervision as well as supervision from their placement manager. There are some supervision records which do not show reflective discussion to ensure that carers are meeting children and young people's needs. Some carers say that they do discuss such issues. The agency are aware that recording of supervisions is an area that they need to develop and they have plans of how they are going to do this, including a training course that is being developed. However, not all current records show this to be happening at this point in time.

Matching of children and foster carers is taken very seriously by the agency. Carers and placing authorities say that the main focus is the needs of the children and young people and that placements are not made just to fill spaces. The agency works effectively with placing authorities, but will challenge placement moves that do not seem to be in the best interests of children and young people. This helps to ensure that children and young people do not have to move placements without good reason and in their best interests.

There is a good range of training for carers. This includes core training that carers are expected to undertake. There are clear expectations for carers about the amount of training they need to do each year. Outside agencies also say that there is a good level of carer training. This helps to ensure that in the vast majority of cases carers have the skills and knowledge to provide high standards of care. There was a time since the previous inspection when training in the East Midlands area was limited,

but this has been addressed now. Carers say that training is of a good standard and that the agency helps them to attend training. However, the timeliness of training is not always good enough. There were recommendations that some carers should undertake specific training following an incident, but this is not due to be provided for up to 10 months after it was recommended. This delay is out of keeping with the overall quality of training provision, but it does have the potential to limit the high standard of care for some young people. Prospective carers who are undertaking the Skills to Foster Course say that they found the training informative and enjoyable.

There are annual reviews of foster carers suitability, except in some cases where this has not been possible or appropriate due to on-going issues. In one case since the previous inspection an annual review was not undertaken in a way that complied with the Foster Care Agreement. However, the agency accept their mistake in doing this and say that they have learnt from it. Carers spoken to during the inspection were happy with the review process. Reviews are currently undertaken appropriately.

The agency has a new initiative which provides specific placements for parents and babies. The carers involved in this have had a good level of training and feel well supported. The agency is able to provide assessments for courts by an experienced and qualified social worker. In one case a judge was very complimentary about the carer's experience to undertake her role, her professionalism and the quality of information provided to the court. A parent from one of the placements said she was very happy with what the placement had provided. This aspect of the service provides good placements that meet the specific needs of children who are placed in them.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

As children and young people grow up in foster homes, they are helped to take age-appropriate risks. This helps them to grow into teenagers and adults who have the knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe. They have access to age appropriate information on issues such as bullying and on-line safety through the children's website and leaflets. The leaflets on bullying were designed in conjunction with the children and young people's consultation group. There is information on how to make a complaint in the older children's guide. Children and young people who responded to Ofsted surveys said that they feel safe in their foster homes and that they know how to make a complaint.

There is a low number of children who go missing from foster homes. The agency has a lower percentage of children and young people going missing than the average for all independent fostering agencies. When children and young people do go missing there are appropriate responses from the agency and carers to help ensure their safety. Placement managers and some foster carers have training in child sexual exploitation and on-line safety to help them recognise and respond to any concerns in a way that safeguards children and young people. Staff and carers say that they would feel able to whistle blow if they had any concerns. Children and

young people say that they feel safe in their foster homes and that they know how to make a complaint.

Safe care plans and risk assessments are used to help carers provide safe homes for children to live in. These are reviewed as required to ensure they remain relevant. The agency responds effectively to any concerns about foster carers or the care of children and young people. They work well with other agencies to ensure a consistent response to any such concerns. Local authority designated officers (LADOs) and placing authorities say that they are satisfied with how the agency responds to safeguarding concerns. One LADO said that the agency act appropriately, will challenge carers over what may be unacceptable behaviour. Also that they will advocate for carers, but put children first.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a Registered Manager who has been in post since 2012. He has appropriate experience and qualifications to undertake this role. However, currently he does not have professional supervision to help him reflect on practice. There are very good working relationships with other agencies such as schools, placing authorities and safeguarding agencies. These help to ensure that children and young people's needs are met effectively. Commissioners say that the service thinks ahead and is responsive to meet their needs. The requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have all been addressed.

There is an Statement of Purpose which provides clear information on the services that the agency provides. There are two children's guides, aimed at different ages and levels of understanding. The guide has also been provided in a different language to meet individual children and young people's needs. These guides provide information for children and young people about the agency and being fostered. However, while the younger age guide includes contact details other agencies and organisations, including Ofsted, it does not tell children that they can use these numbers to make a complaint. Despite this the guides are informative and age appropriate.

There are monitoring processes in place so that the Registered Manager is aware of the progress of individual children and young people, and of the functioning of the agency. As referred to above there are some records such as supervision records which are not all sufficiently clear and informative. While the majority of other records are clear, some are not. For example, while everyone involved knows what the status of placements are, this is not always clearly recorded, so the information may be confusing for children and young people who wish to read their records in years to come. However, monitoring had identified that some records needed to be clearer and there are plans and training being developed to help ensure that all records meet the required standard. There is a complaints procedure in place. As a result of a complaint shortfalls in some areas of practice and the complaints procedure itself were identified. The agency have taken action to address all of

shortfalls identified and so improve the functioning of the agency. Records of complaints are kept by the agency, however, they are not easy to identify and monitor. This may not have been a problem while the agency was small and had very few complaints, but as they grow it becomes harder to have an effective overview of them.

Staff who work for the agency are appropriately qualified. They say that their on-going training and development needs are met. Supervision of placement managers covers areas of practice to help raise standards. All carers either have or are working towards the Training and Development Standards. This all helps to ensure that the staff and carers in the agency have the knowledge and skills to provide a good service for children and young people.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.