

Anglia Fostering Agency

Anglia Fostering Agency Limited

1st Floor, 12 Meridian Way, Meridian Business Park, Norwich NR7 0TA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The agency registered in 2010. In 2024, it was acquired by a larger private company. The agency office is in Norfolk with a sub-office in the East Midlands. It recruits, trains and supports foster carers across East Anglia and the East of England.

The agency provides a range of placements, including short-, medium- and long-term care and permanent placements for all age groups. It also provides therapeutic placements and parent and child placements. The agency has 46 fostering households, providing placements for 65 children.

The experienced and suitably qualified registered manager has been in post since 2015.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 November 2024

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: 26 April 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This fostering agency offers an outstanding service to foster carers and their children. As a result, the children's experiences and progress are excellent.

The agency provides a holistic model of care. Leaders and managers understand that well-looked-after staff and carers offer tailored, patient and effective care to children. This high level of support is seen throughout the day-to-day work at the agency and the commitment and continuance of the foster carers and staff.

Children are making exceptional progress. Children are supported to stay with families even when this is challenging. In some families, carers have given up other full-time jobs to remain at home to support their foster children. The agency also promotes brothers and sisters staying together wherever possible. It supports a range of permanency options for children that are best suited to their needs. The agency has supported carers through legal matters with kindness and sensitivity. Children become part of carers' families and often stay on in 'staying put arrangements'. One carer said about their child, 'It's like he has always been here and he always will.'

Children attend school and have bespoke education packages tailored to their needs. Several children took GCSE exams this year and achieved grades that were above the national average. The agency has a head of education who oversees all education matters for children. He makes sure that important meetings happen on time and children receive their entitlements. He runs drop-in surgeries once a month that carers and social work staff attend. These provide opportunities for carers to talk about any challenges they have with their children and receive advice and support. Agency workers go above and beyond to help carers and children to gain support in education. One carer said about her social worker, 'She frequently goes over and above in her role. A recent example would be the many hours she has invested in helping to procure an education, health and care plan for one of my young people.'

The agency has developed bespoke apprenticeship offers for foster children and birth children. One child did a week-long finance apprenticeship and is now working at an accountancy firm. Another child is interested in law and did a week's legal apprenticeship, looking at policies and contributing their views. The agency has links with a firm that offers opportunities in law for children who are care-experienced. These beneficial opportunities align with the aspirations the agency has for their children.

Children are sensitively welcomed into new placements. Each child receives a welcome box from the agency. This is full of thoughtful gifts for children. Every box also has the agency teddy bear, 'Taylor'. Children spoke fondly of Taylor; one child

said he was on her bed with all her other teddy bears. Taylor features in the children's newsletter, which goes out every quarter.

The newsletters are designed by children alongside the agency's children's worker. They broach important topics like internet safety. Children help to design leaflets with information about the service. The newsletters and leaflets have beautiful illustrations, which is another theme throughout the agency. The quality of these shows the value the agency places on sharing their information in an accessible way. Children and carers continue to create their own identity as an agency. The agency has lots of innovative ways of capturing children's voices, for example during visits, open days, annual reviews and through events such as the 'news team'. However, there was one occasion, during a significant change to a fostering household, when the children's views were not captured.

The agency arranges group social events and activities for carers, staff and their families to participate in. There have been several throughout the year, and everyone spoke highly of these. Children particularly enjoyed the food choices that were available. The agency hired out a cinema screen, and carers, staff and their families were invited along. There have also been animal petting days and trips to the seaside. Creating opportunities like these builds on the inclusive feel that has been created.

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

Children build very strong relationships with their carers and the agency social workers. Children's views, wishes and feelings are regularly sought. This helps children to feel listened to and share difficult feelings with their carers. This helps carers to access support for children when necessary.

The agency has a lead in neurodiversity, which is an area it considers carefully. The agency provides specialist training in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) through a specially qualified coach who provides coaching sessions for parents and one-to-one work with children.'

Carers provided excellent feedback on the training and how it has helped them adapt their approach with children with ADHD. One carer said, 'I recently undertook training on ADHD and found this invaluable. The style that it was delivered in was exceptional.' One child is proud of his ADHD because of the support his carers have offered. The agency is committed to ensuring children's needs are met. The agency has sought specialist input for children, including funding when this has been required.

Carers rarely use physical intervention with children. Carers are trained in de-escalation techniques, and they know their children really well. This helps children to feel safe, and the level of incidents is low.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, carers are proactive in looking for them and following the process. The agency has a robust out-of-hours support package that offers extra support and guidance to carers. Children return home quickly and safely. Supervising social workers go above and beyond in these instances to check in and make sure children are safe and carers are supported. Additional therapeutic support is also offered when needed.

Children are supported to build their identity. Carers offer non-judgemental and sensitive care that helps children to feel accepted. The agency supports children by advocating for things that are important to them, such as changing their name. The agency had a stall at the local Pride event, and carers, staff and their families all came together to take part in the parade.

Leaders and managers have an effective system that helps them to oversee the support needs of any children and families who are experiencing extra difficulties. These children are carefully monitored, and agency social workers make sure that they are offering extra support and assistance to carers.

Keeping children safe online is an increasing aspect of life for carers and workers. The agency offers stimulating training for this. It has developed bitesize information on its online learning platform and educates children by developing resources in the newsletter that is created by the children.

The agency takes all allegations against foster carers or concerns about the quality of care provided seriously. Thorough care assessments have taken place when necessary. The agency supports carers through the safeguarding process. It encourages open and transparent practice and continues to educate carers in this area. One carer who has recently been through this process said, 'As an agency, they were brilliant throughout the whole allegation process, being super supportive.' Staff, including panel members, have up-to-date safeguarding training that includes looking at unconscious bias and how that can affect their practice. This helps to encourage staff reflection when exploring safeguarding concerns.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is managed by an established, efficient and effective manager. The manager has worked for the agency for over 10 years. She has an exceptional knowledge of the service, the carers and the children. She is committed to improving the service and has high aspirations for all children. She is supported by a dedicated and experienced leadership team.

The agency was acquired by an umbrella organisation. The agency has been able to maintain its own identity, which has been described as a having a 'family feel', while using the wider resources available to enhance its service and practice.

The organisational change and acquisition by the larger umbrella organisation has been undertaken seamlessly. Staff said that they felt supported and contained during this time, which otherwise could have felt difficult. One member of staff said, 'We cannot underestimate the importance of the manager's continued contribution to the

ethos and values of the agency.' All staff felt reassured that the values of the agency had been maintained. The overall culture of the agency has been exceptionally well maintained despite the organisational changes.

Leaders and managers have a comprehensive understanding of the agency's strengths and areas for development. They are proactive in making changes and embedding learning. The manager uses a variety of tools to closely monitor the quality of care and capture children's progress over time. Since the last inspection, the agency has worked hard to reduce the use of any professional language that could be seen to stigmatise children. This change in language has been done in conjunction with children's views, and the whole agency has adopted this new approach. Two children said that they were proud of some of the leaflets they had created as part of these changes.

The manager is supported by a skilled team of staff who know the carers and children exceptionally well. The staff team is highly ambitious for the children. High aspiration and ambition are supported by the agency; it goes above and beyond to provide support to carers to enhance children's lives. The agency has a variety of staff and trainers who are care-experienced or have fostering experience. This helps children and families to feel represented and understood.

Foster carers and staff receive a varied range of training. This includes the use of an online platform, which holds a variety of functions. This platform brings together online training, webinars, podcasts and signposting to other external resources. A carer said, 'I think some of the trainers are phenomenal. They are engaging and interactive and the agency offers a breadth of training.' Part of the online platform provides a monthly focus on areas of interest, including capturing the voices and experiences of care-experienced people and expert guest speakers. A carer said, 'As a foster carer, the support and resources they provide have made a tremendous difference in both my role and in the lives of the children I care for.'

The agency recruits a range of foster carers. It has developed its own assessment record to capture foster applicants' experiences as part of this assessment. Assessments are detailed and timely. The fostering panel offers effective challenge and review as part of the assessment process. Some staff are trained in specialised therapeutic assessment and interview techniques to help ensure new carers' suitability and address any areas of vulnerability. Previously, when two new carers left the service within their first year of fostering, leaders and managers undertook in-depth reviews to highlight learning from this.

The manager and staff all know the carers and children in their care exceptionally well. Agency plans to support children are extensive and effective. Staff work with professionals and family members to achieve the best outcomes for children. At times, this includes challenging professionals to advocate for children's best interests, relevant therapeutic services and funding for specialist assessments. However, on some occasions, these challenges have not been escalated effectively in line with the agency's policy.

Overall, foster carers were resoundingly positive about their experiences with the agency. Many carers have been with the agency for several years because of the quality of support they receive. One carer said, 'My supervising social worker is outstanding in her role. The manager is always kind, supportive, knowledgeable and goes out of her way to help with any issues that may arise. I honestly feel that these two people are the best possible supports for me and the children I care for.' Another carer said, 'I feel very grateful to be a part of such an empowering, supportive agency. They have helped me become the best version of myself over the years both personally and professionally.' The dedicated and comprehensive support helps carers to provide outstanding care to children.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. In particular, ensure that all members of the fostering household are consulted about changes. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 1.7)
- The registered person should regularly monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies. In particular, they should ensure that their escalation policy is followed when children's local authority plans are not received. ('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: SC406969

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