

Child Action North West

Child Action North West

Dixon House, Whalley Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 9LL

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of a wider charitable organisation. Its main functions are to recruit, assess, approve, train and support foster carers. The service provides emergency, respite, short-term, long-term, PACE, remand, and parent and child foster placements.

The manager was registered to manage the service in July 2017.

Inspection dates: 20 to 24 January 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 23 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people benefit from well-supported foster placements. They feel part of family life and are integrated into their communities. Children and young people live in stable and caring environments, and this underpins the individual progress that they make.

Children and young people build secure and trusting relationships with their carers. These relationships positively influence their emotional growth and well-being. They experience a sense of belonging and permanence with their carers.

Thoughtful and careful planning takes place to ensure that young people's needs are considered prior to their transition into adulthood. There is appropriate and robust challenge and negotiation by staff with other agencies to ensure that children and young people's needs are fully met.

Foster carers are fully supported in their roles by a team of dedicated staff that offer timely guidance and assistance. One foster carer commented: 'The support we receive makes us good foster carers.'

Children and young people grow in confidence and self-esteem and, from this secure base, make progress in education, widen their positive social experiences and develop aspirations for their futures. They are encouraged to participate and contribute to the agency's goals and their feedback is valued. In response to this feedback, recent changes have included substantial redesign and refurbishment of young people's space within the head office building.

Children and young people who have complex and diverse needs are appropriately placed with carers who are able to meet those needs. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made with respect to matching, and early identification of additional needs avoids unsustainable placement decisions being made.

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

Managers have a robust and transparent approach to investigating safeguarding concerns. They actively and appropriately challenge other agencies' responses when they consider enquiries have not been sufficiently comprehensive.

Carers report feeling fully supported to maintain boundaries and meet the challenges that some young people's behaviours may present. Through this support and consistency, young people are offered safe and dependable care. Foster carers use de-escalation techniques to good effect and managers promote a child-centred understanding of behaviour.

Overall, young people do not go missing from home and the number of such incidents is very low. Carers and staff understand young people's vulnerabilities and risks. However, some risk assessments are not kept up to date with all incidents of missing from home and this limits information that is available to respite carers.

Staff are recruited to work at the agency through appropriate vetting procedures. The recruitment of foster carers, however, does not fully utilise the full range of searches that the guidance suggests. For example, there is no scrutiny of social media platforms as a means of searching for individuals or seeking additional information.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Managers promote a child-centred ethos and culture within the agency. They ensure that decision-making promotes good-quality care and is in the interests of children and young people. The manager is ambitious to continuously improve and evolve the service.

Within this context, carers and staff receive timely and appropriate levels of supervision, support and advice. Foster carers are regularly consulted and canvassed for their views on both the strengths and weaknesses within the organisation. From this feedback, managers have responded positively and made changes, for example greater access to quality online training and access to evening meetings and training.

Service development and partnership working are a strength of the management team. For example, members of the team attend various forums and are open to sharing and learning in order to better serve the children and young people that they look after.

The management team is extremely knowledgeable about all the children and young people in its care. This understanding informs and supports staff's advocacy on behalf of children and young people. Regular child-focused meetings with relevant agencies ensure that assessments of need remain up to date and appropriately informed.

Documentation tracking the progress of children and young people is spread over a number of documents and there is no consistency in how this is recorded. There is over-reliance on individual staff or managers to distil and summarise progress. This is a vulnerability should staff complement change. In addition, although young people moving towards transition into adulthood are carefully assessed by the agency, this process does not benefit from local authority pathway plans. Current escalation processes to secure these from the local authorities are limited in their scope.

Managers are self-reflective and encourage learning from placement endings that are unplanned. Responses to these events are thoughtful and seek to prevent reoccurrence. For example, in one case, specific and targeted training was commissioned in order to address foster carers' understanding and knowledge base.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>Ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster carers is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>Specifically, in relation to improving the standard of risk assessments for children and ensuring that quality assurance processes relating to foster carer assessments are comprehensive.</p>	31/03/2020

Recommendations

- Ensure that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence, and that these are reflected in young people's relevant plans. (National Minimum Standards 12.3)

In particular, that the agency secures the local authority's written plan with regards to pathway planning.
- Ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standard 26.2)

In particular, that the progress of children is recorded and located in an easily accessible format.

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: SC036972

Registered provider: Child Action North West

Registered provider address: Child Action North West, Dixon House, Whalley Road, Blackburn, Lancashire BB1 9LL

Responsible individual: Susan Cotton

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Inspectors

Pauline Yates, social care inspector

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