

Nexus Fostering

Nexus Fostering Ltd

4 Jardine House, Harrovian Business Village, Bessborough Road, Harrow HA1 3EX
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Nexus Fostering provides fostering services in London, the home counties, the southeast and southwest of England, East Anglia and the Midlands. It operates under one registration from its main office in London and has satellite offices in Birmingham, Gloucester, Norwich, Cambridge, Hornchurch, Telford and Luton.

The agency provides a wide range of placements: short-term, long-term, parent and child, brothers and sisters, children who have disabilities, enhanced therapeutic placements and 'staying put' for young people.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 420 children and young people within 291 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 October 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

Date of last inspection: 7 December 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children and young people make exceptional progress from their challenging starting points.

- Children and young people receive highly individualised care from foster carers, who are finely attuned to meeting their needs. Children and young people build lasting relationships with foster carers, who help them to flourish in placement and beyond.
- Risks to children and young people are significantly reduced as a result of the agency's robust safeguarding practices.
- The commitment of foster carers to supporting the children and young people to achieve positive outcomes is palpable. Children and young people experience sustained improvement to their lives.
- Children and young people benefit from research-informed practice that makes a difference to their overall experiences. There are examples of practice that are worthy of wider dissemination.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate aspirational leadership and are ambitious for the children and young people.
- Leaders and managers work in close partnership with carers and professionals to ensure that the welfare of each child and young person is at the heart of all their practice.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure foster carers achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The vast majority of children and young people make exceptional progress from their challenging starting points. A social worker stated that her child has achieved 'impossible outcomes' since being placed with his foster carers. Another social worker stated that her young person has 'managed to turn her life around' with the support of her carers. Another social worker described the transformation of her child as 'beautiful'. Children and young people thrive in their placements. Children and young people who spoke to inspectors stated that there was nothing that they wanted to change about their carers or the home that they live in.

Children and young people often make significant improvements to their physical, behavioural and emotional well-being. They have access to specialist services, such as child and adolescent mental health services, to support their complex needs. They also benefit from the agency's 'care plus' programme. It is research based and delivers robust therapeutic support to families through a thorough understanding of challenging behaviour. The programme also offers pragmatic strategies to bring about changes in behaviour. Consequently, children and young people, including those who have come from psychiatric units and failed adoptive placements, experience successful placement outcomes.

Children and young people attend school or other kinds of educational provision. Most make excellent progress in both their attendance and attainment. Their maladaptive behaviour is significantly reduced. They improve in their social skills. Children and young people are exposed to new experiences that enhance their independent living skills.

'Staying put' arrangements are promoted when they are appropriate to the young person's assessment. Careful consideration is given to the level of support that the foster carers will need and what they can offer young people to promote their best interests. Young people flourish under these 'staying put' arrangements. They can further their academic studies and/or be gainfully employed. They have a sense of normalcy, hope and optimism in their lives. They enjoy unwavering support from their foster carers, who have become their family, and they have a place to call their home.

Disabled children and young people receive a highly specialised level of care. Many experience an improved quality of life as the result of the efforts made by the foster carers and staff. For example, one severely disabled child's 'do not resuscitate' order has been rescinded and her life expectancy has increased due to the exceptional care that she has received.

The quality of assessments of prospective foster carers is thorough. Managers provide good oversight of the analysis of the applicant's fostering capacity. They are very careful to match children and young people to foster carers who can meet their

assessed needs. Managers also carefully consider the impact of the placements on existing household members. Information is shared between the agency, placing authorities and foster carers. Staff work closely with the placing authorities to ensure that the services outlined in the placement plans are delivered.

A placing officer stated that both the support offered to the foster carers and the partnership working had a 'positive impact on her young person, helping her to meet and improve her outcomes in all areas'.

The agency provides good parent-and-child placements. Parents learn about stages of child development and have opportunities to be assessed on their ability to occupy a parental role in their babies' lives. Babies are kept safe. They benefit from routines and the quality of nurturing that they receive.

Brothers and sisters are placed together, and they are supported to reduce familial conflict. Foster carers understand and meet the needs of each individual child or young person within the family group.

Placement breakdowns are rare, as every effort is made to support the children and young people and the foster carers. On the rare occasions that a placement ends in an unplanned way, managers assess what could have been done differently so that they learn from the ending. This learning is then implemented.

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

Children and young people receive excellent help and protection from their foster carers and the agency staff and managers. Most children and young people, including those deemed to be highly vulnerable, rarely go missing from care. They also experience a substantial reduction in their risk of being subject to child sexual exploitation. The complex needs of children and young people are well understood by the foster carers and agency staff, who plan effectively to significantly reduce the risks.

Foster carers and staff do not give up on the children and young people easily when they exhibit challenging behaviour. They persevere and use professional expertise to help children and young people to reduce their behavioural difficulties. One young person, who caused several thousand pounds' worth of damage to his foster home, received effective intervention from the agency staff. He also cleaned up the mess that he had made, and his foster carers kept him in the placement.

Children and young people learn to self-regulate and are able to use good coping skills. Consequently, the majority experience positive relationships with peers and adults and make exceptional progress in key areas of their lives.

Children and young people spoken with stated that they felt safe in their foster placements and were able to identify trusted adults whom they can talk to about any concerns, including about their foster carers. It is apparent that children and young people, including those who have experienced severe trauma and multiple

placement changes in the past, enjoy secure attachments to their foster carers. Such attachment helps children and young people to not only feel safe but to develop self-efficacy. A number of young people have developed the confidence that they need to succeed in school and go on to university.

Foster carers and staff adhere to the agency's child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. They work in partnership with agencies and those who matter to the children and the young people to ensure that they have every opportunity to develop a sense of safety and well-being, in and out of the placement, and to experience sustained improvements in their lives.

Investigations into serious incidents or allegations of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies and are handled robustly, in line with the statutory guidance. Designated officers indicate that incidents are appropriately managed by the agency.

Managers actively promote safe care and make at least one unannounced visit to each foster carer annually. Children and young people can speak with trusted adults without their foster carers being present. They also provide feedback about their foster carers for their annual reviews. Consequently, children and young people feel heard and empowered.

The agency is properly staffed and safe recruitment practices are in place.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers have great aspirations for children and young people and have successfully created a culture in which staff and foster carers share that ambition. Leaders and managers lead by example, and they inspire staff and foster carers to deliver the highest quality of care for children and young people. They do not believe that a stable placement necessarily means that the child is making exceptional progress. They measure success for each child and young person individually and set appropriately high expectations for them. Leaders and managers ensure that the agency sustains the improvement in outcomes for the children and young people in their placements. Furthermore, most children's and young people's life chances are significantly enhanced by the time that they leave care.

Agency staff, managers and leaders care about the children and young people as if they were their own. This approach is shared with the foster carers, who take deep pride in their children's and young people's achievements, as well as feeling genuine sorrow for their experiences of grief and loss. Foster carers praise staff and managers for the excellent support that they provide to them. Foster carers have access to 24-hour support, which, in turn, helps the children and young people placed with them. Effective support and guidance for foster carers prevent placement breakdowns. They also help the foster carers to identify the core issues that impact on the children and young people.

Foster carers enjoy support groups, social events and other opportunities to meet collectively. This allows for the sharing of good practice in caring for children and young people. A foster carer described the agency as 'one big family'. Newsletters

provide agency updates and information on the impact that the foster carers and staff are having on the lives of the children and young people. The birth children of the foster carers, as well as the children and young people, take advantage of the range of activities offered. Consequently, they feel supported and connected to one another.

The fostering panel consistently promotes safe and stable placements through robust challenge and scrutiny. The panel chair has extensive experience in fostering and is clear about the role of the panel. Central list members of the fostering panel have a range of skills which include social work, health, education and fostering.

Leaders and managers are dedicated to developing their staff. Staff are challenged on their practice and improve as a result. Supervision and training take place regularly, which staff benefit from. Staff members state that they are well supported in their roles. Their love for their job is clearly visible, and their faces light up when they talk about the children and young people and how much they have achieved in their placements. The agency is unquestionably child focused. Whether you are a manager or staff member, the child or young person is at the heart of your practice.

Verbal and written feedback from the children and young people is routinely used as an integral part of foster carer reviews and staff appraisals. This means that children and young people feel listened to, valued and essential to promoting a culture of accountability.

Leaders and managers champion the expertise of the workforce and foster carers. Each member of staff's particular talents are recognised and matched to a specific child or young person to help to meet his or her challenging needs, resulting in positive outcomes. Foster carers who have vast experience in meeting the complex needs of disabled children help to train other carers.

The agency has implemented the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme. The agency ensures that the newly qualified social workers employed in this role are exposed to work that meets the expectations of the professional capabilities framework at ASYE level. Leaders and managers are keen to promote the principles of good social work practice for their staff's professional development.

Managers and staff are constantly seeking to improve. Leaders and managers do not stagnate or rest on their laurels. Since the last inspection, the agency has grown in size, which the leaders have managed effectively. While doing so, they have not taken the focus off supporting the children's and young people's best interests.

The registered manager's assessments of the agency's strengths and areas for improvement are rigorous, thorough and underpinned by the national minimum standards. Leaders and managers routinely undertake a review of the quality of the fostering service. They evaluate how they are fulfilling the aims and objectives set out in their statement of purpose. Their evaluation is used purposefully as a tool for continuous improvement.

A small number of foster carers have not achieved the training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. Leaders and managers have a plan in place to tackle this issue.

Views from social workers, carers and professionals are very positive about the agency's partnership work to promote the best outcomes for the children and young people.

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 difference 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

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