

# Foster Care Associates Thames Valley

Foster Care Associates Limited

Wavendon Tower, Wavendon Business Park, Ortensia Drive, Milton Keynes MK17 8LX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates (FCA) Thames Valley is a regional branch of a large privately owned organisation, Polaris. The agency provides emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements for children of all ages up to the age of 18. The agency also maintains placements for those who have moved on to independence and remain with their foster carer. There are currently 55 fostering households and 61 children in placements.

The manager was registered with Ofsted on 16 November 2022.

### Inspection dates: 7 to 11 November 2022

**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**

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:** 8 May 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children make excellent progress as a direct result of their foster care placements arranged by the agency. Foster carers have all the qualities needed to make a real difference to a child's life, through their commitment, resilience, empathy and understanding.

Children form close bonds and trusting relationships with their foster carers. Children feel that their needs, feelings and interests are respected, and they feel secure in their placements.

Children of school age are all in education. Some children have bespoke education support packages. These have been arranged by proactive supervising social workers and their managers. Older children have achieved well beyond their expectations. As a result, some are now at university.

Children know how to make a complaint. One child has been supported by the agency to make a formal complaint in relation to discrimination. The child received a response detailing how their views had challenged the way professionals thought and how they reacted to individual children. This shows how diversity and culture are respected throughout the whole organisation.

Staff and managers ensure that children's cultural and ethnic needs are met, by having foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds. Heritage is celebrated and children are supported by informed carers. Managers are compassionate and proactive in ensuring that the whole team stays up to date with current affairs through team meetings and peer reflection groups.

Managers and staff fully understand the importance of listening carefully and responding to children's views, feelings and ideas about the development of the agency. For example, children talk fondly about being part of decision-making in relation to activities and celebration days that are arranged by the agency.

Parent and child placements are an exceptional strength of the agency. The support is creative and practical. Foster carers are fully committed, going above and beyond to support parents to care for their young children. Parents told the inspector that they are now motivated and ambitious about their life. The faultless quality of care from foster carers has taught parents the meaning of family life and parenthood.

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

Excellent safeguarding practice is threaded throughout the agency. Clear and concise risk assessments provide foster carers with all the relevant information to help them to support children to take age-appropriate risks.

Effective communication and cohesive relationships with professionals reduce the risk to children who go missing from care or may be at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation.

All staff and foster carers are appropriately qualified and have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide informed care for children. Lifelong learning is embedded throughout practice and reflected in the supervision of foster carers and in the planning of children's care. This learning is a continued focus of the agency, which supports its approach to keeping children safe.

Allegations against foster carers are managed effectively. Recording is thorough and learning is embedded in practice through group reflective supervisions and foster carer support groups. Managers encourage supervising social workers and foster carers to be curious and embrace challenge.

Foster carers are proactive in supporting each other. There has been a significant increase in attendance at support groups. Peer discussions have promoted communication about how to manage children's behaviour and seek advice. This is further strengthened by the newly appointed therapeutic practitioner, who has a clear vision to support the whole staff team, foster carers and the children.

A learning culture is embedded throughout the agency. Supervising social workers are encouraged and supported by managers to use research and resources to enrich their practice and safeguard children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The newly appointed registered manager is experienced, self-motivated and inspiring. Supported by an equally passionate, determined and experienced fostering manager, they are dedicated to maintaining excellent standards throughout the agency. Leaders and managers know the strengths of the agency and are meticulous in identifying areas of performance that may not meet the agency's high expectations.

Monitoring systems are versatile and highly effective. They create a platform for the registered manager to have thorough and organised oversight, identifying themes or concerns effectively. For example, when staff performance is not of the expected standard, this is addressed promptly. This prevents drift and enables staff and foster carers to receive appropriate support and guidance in supporting children to achieve their goals.

Comprehensive oversight and reporting to the senior leadership team by the registered manager have improved the retention of staff and foster carers. There has been a significant decrease in unplanned endings to children's placements.

Highly valued supervising social workers receive practice-related supervision. Group reflection practice sessions enable staff to be inquisitive and resourceful. For

example, when a child's placement was at risk of breakdown due to an increase in challenging behaviour, the team around the child came together and produced a creative and innovative plan. Consequently, the child has remained with their foster carer.

The registered manager has completed their own review of the quality of care. Although the content meets the regulations, the delay in sending this to Ofsted prevents the regulator from having up-to-date oversight of any current concern or the significant progress made by the agency and children. However, this does not impact on the determination of staff and managers to continually strive for excellence.

The fostering panel is organised and effective, offering good-quality support to new and experienced foster carers. It is chaired by a knowledgeable and independent person. However, the skills and experience of some of the members of the panel do not always enable them to take full account of the nature of children's needs or the foster carers who provide care. For example, there is no permanent health or education representative. Nonetheless, the panel chair does actively seek input if necessary, and decisions are not delayed as a result.

The agency decision-maker offers clarity and scrutiny in decision-making. Information and reports are received in a timely way, enabling decision-making to be timely, high quality and appropriate. Any recommendations or decisions are in line with the agency's overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

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

### **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of people on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 14.8)

### **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:** SC047677

**Registered provider:** Foster Care Associates Limited

**Registered provider address:** Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

**Responsible individual:** John Platt

**Registered manager:** Catherine Knight

**Telephone number:** 01296 628300

**Email address:**

### **Inspector**

Jill Sephton-Wright, 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 children looked after, 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](mailto: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 [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](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](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2022