

Progress Children's Services

Progress Children's Services Limited

Progress House, 127 Millfields Road, Wolverhampton WV4 6JG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is a private limited company. The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term and parent and child placements. The agency also offers short-break services. There were 39 fostering households providing care to 42 children at the time of the inspection. The manager has been registered with Ofsted since July 2017.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 22 to 26 November 2021

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

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

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: 7 November 2017

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 are cared for by carers who know them incredibly well. Children have excellent relationships with foster carers and benefit from stable, long-term placements, with many children staying with their foster families for years. One child told the inspector how, after staying six years with his foster family, he felt a sense of relief knowing he could stay beyond his 18th birthday. The exceptional nurture and care children receive from their carers means that children feel valued and part of their fostering family.

Child-centred practice by foster carers and staff is driven by a therapeutic understanding of children's needs. An excellent wraparound service, which includes therapeutic intervention and family support, ensures that everyone works together creatively to progress through challenging times in children's lives. A child used the word 'togetherness' to describe the agency's values and the word 'family' was used by staff and carers to describe how they all see each other.

Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. For example, children develop a strong sense of identity, learn how to express their feelings, develop trusting relationships, join activity clubs, enjoy holidays with their foster families, make significant progress with their learning, develop new skills like learning to ride a bicycle and become more independent, in line with their age, development and needs.

The agency's core strength is providing placements for children with complex health needs. Skilled carers provide the very best care for children with significant needs. Staff ensure that children have individual and detailed health assessments. The registered manager is a strong advocate for children and has ensured that children and carers have bespoke support so that children's needs are met to a high standard. One carer told inspectors that she did not know how she would have coped without the support she has received. All carers spoken to during the inspection shared that it did not matter who they spoke to in the agency, it felt like they knew them and their children well.

Children are welcomed into their foster homes sensitively. Carers work hard to provide children with a warm and nurturing environment where consistent routines and boundaries are in place. This helps children to settle well and provides the foundation on which they thrive.

The agency works well with children's placing authorities to ensure that full information is always shared with foster carers before children move in. Careful and considered matching contributes to placement stability for children.

Carers and staff work collaboratively with schools to ensure that each child's educational needs are properly assessed and met. The staff and foster carers'

excellent support means that all children are in education and have good attendance. When a child was not previously attending school, careful evaluation of his needs ensured that a suitable school placement was found. In addition, pastoral support and access to a forest school enabled the child to settle and make progress. The agency places a high value on children's educational progress and often presents children with certificates to celebrate their achievements.

Children can stay with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday. This gives children a sense of security and permanence. It also provides them with important support throughout their further education and in developing essential life skills in readiness for independence. For children who do move on when they reach adulthood, careful and considered planning means that children move on positively and with support.

The agency places significant value on children's views. Children's feedback is gathered on a regular basis, for example, children contribute to their carers' annual review and give feedback about their experiences at different group activities. Staff are creative and effective in ensuring that children who are non-verbal are heard and contribute to their care.

Foster carer assessments are thorough. Carers say they were considered with sensitivity by the assessor and the fostering panel. New foster carers state that they feel welcomed and valued by the agency. All new carers are provided with a mentor who provides support and guidance as and when required. Foster carers are prepared extremely well for their role, which contributes to high levels of care and stability for children.

The agency holds regular activity events throughout the year, in which children, their foster families and staff participate. The events are agency-wide and provide the children with a chance to develop skills while forming friendships and a sense of belonging. For example, children enjoy attending different groups, including a summer youth club. Staff also organise and take part in special events. At Christmas, for example, a trip to the pantomime has been arranged for all children, carers and their families.

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

Safer care plans and children's risk assessments are detailed with known risks and behaviours and strategies to manage these. Carers follow children's plans and extensive support is put in place when needed through the in-house therapist and family support service to help maintain stable placements for children. Carers place a high value on the support they get from the therapist. The training in this method is now being rolled out to carers, which will further enhance children's care.

Procedures around children going missing from home are understood by carers, who follow these diligently. Children who go missing from home experience well-coordinated responses that help locate them and return them safely to their foster carers. Risks relating to children going missing are well understood by carers and the

agency and acted on. The agency has challenged a child's placing authority to ensure that children have their return home interview and will ensure that there is a robust plan in place to keep children safe. The level of management oversight ensures high levels of safety planning for children.

When children make allegations, these concerns are promptly referred to the designated officer. The agency works in partnership with other professionals, including social workers, to promote the safety and welfare of children. When there are concerns, the agency has challenged carers' practice. For two fostering households, this led to a review at panel and recommendations made for deregistration. This child-centred practice helps to ensure that only adults who are safe care for children.

All foster carers are trained in the agency's approved behaviour management model and are aware that physical intervention is to be used as a last resort to prevent children from harming themselves or others. Most children are very settled in their foster homes and incidents of restraint are rare. Children are spoken to following such incidents and all incidents have good management oversight. Staff will undertake further reflection with carers to help them manage incidents differently and will support carers to attend refresher training when deemed appropriate.

Staff undertake at least one unannounced visit to each foster carer annually. On one occasion, agency staff did not consider and report on all the issues specific to a foster carer's circumstances during the unannounced visit. To date this has not had an impact on children's safety and welfare.

Children can identify a trusted adult to talk to, including family support workers and carers. Children develop a sense of belonging and safety because of the support they receive.

Recruitment of carers, staff and panel members is robust. There is effective management oversight of recruitment, which helps to ensure that only safe adults provide care and support to children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager is passionate, dynamic and inspirational. She is highly visible and has helped the agency grow and develop. The registered manager has been at the forefront of the agency's drive for excellence. There is a culture of high expectations which runs through the agency and enables managers, staff and foster carers to be aspirational for children.

The registered manager is innovative. She has restructured the team and has introduced new ideas into the service, including the family support service and the Solihull therapeutic approach to promote children's well-being. The family support service is invaluable to foster families and children. Extensive support is helping children with highly complex needs to make significant progress, enjoy positive experiences and benefit from stable family life.

The registered manager undertakes monitoring weekly, monthly and quarterly, which enables her and staff to have an exceptional grasp of children's needs and progress. The number of unplanned endings for children is low. Nevertheless, in these cases, the registered manager ensures that learning takes place to understand what happened and prevent the chances of the same thing happening again.

The fostering panel promotes rigorous quality assurance and oversight of the agency. Panel membership is diverse and the function of the panel works incredibly well. Panel challenges the agency when necessary, provides constructive feedback and helps the agency's drive for excellence.

Managers and staff receive regular and effective supervision that is focused on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback. In addition, staff and leaders receive effective support through team and management meetings, training, individual supervision and annual appraisals. This ensures the professional development of staff and leaders and means that staff work in an environment where good practice thrives.

The registered manager has developed excellent relationships with partner agencies. Good collaborative working means that children receive highly coordinated care and this contributes to them achieving excellent outcomes.

Foster carers are provided with a range of training that equips them with the skills and knowledge to meet the individual needs of the children placed in their care. Carers complete their annual personal development plans, which list their training but do not capture their overall professional strengths, future goals and what they need to do to achieve these.

Foster carers enjoy support groups, social events and other opportunities to meet collectively. There is a monthly support group which is attended by the team manager and the in-house therapist where carers can talk about any difficulties and gain advice. In addition, there is an out-of-hours service providing an additional layer of support. Carers and staff relationships are strong, which helps them to work well together and provide excellent care and support to children.

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

Statutory requirements

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

Requirement	Due date
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))</p> <p>In particular, ensure that when there are specific considerations to be taken account of at each unannounced visit these are monitored and outcomes recorded clearly.</p>	<p>14 January 2022</p>

Recommendation

- The registered manager should ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (NMS, 20.5)

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: SC036627

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Inspectors

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