

Priory Fostering Services

Priory Education Services Limited

The Dairy House, 1 Mathon Place, West Malvern Road, Mathon, Malvern,
Worcestershire WR13 5NZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Priory Fostering Services was registered in 2003 and operates as an independent fostering agency as part of Priory Education Services Limited. The agency is based near Malvern in Worcestershire. The agency provides short term and long term placements for children and young people up to the age of 18, for sibling groups, parent and child placements and unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The registered manager is an experienced social worker and has been managing the agency since 2007. At the time of this inspection, there were 78 children and young people in placement and 45 fostering households.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 April 2019

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: 25 January 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The recruitment and preparation of foster carers are thorough and of a very high standard. This is enhanced by research-based assessments, training and support.

Foster carers feel extremely well supported by the agency's managers and staff. The effect of this on the stability of placements and the progress of children is significant.

Children are well matched to their foster carers. Matching is detailed and very well considered. As a result, placement stability is strong with unplanned endings remaining consistently low.

Children make significant and sustained progress while in the care of their foster families. As a result, they are achieving outstanding personal outcomes. Children who historically have had very poor school attendance are now achieving 100% school attendance and doing well academically.

The agency uses research to inform practice and to enable understanding of the behaviours and responses of children who have suffered trauma in the past. This helps ensure that foster carers can meet the individual needs of all the children they care for, including those with special and additional needs.

Staff and carers carry out focused therapeutic work with children to help them understand their backgrounds and to develop a strong sense of safety and well-being. Consequently, children are better able to understand their behaviour and are able to make huge strides in their development.

Children feel part of their foster families, and carers have high aspirations for them. Children form long-term relationships with their foster carers. As a result, a high number of young people remain living with their foster carers after their 18th birthday and are fully supported to succeed in adult life.

Children feel secure and listened to. Managers, supervising social workers and support staff place a high emphasis on consulting with children to gain their views. The agency uses imaginative ways, such as videos, to support children to give feedback and to communicate their feelings and wishes in a way that is more comfortable for them.

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

Children are supported exceptionally well to be safe in their foster homes. The

agency's social workers and foster carers use secure base and other therapeutic parenting methods to safeguard and to meet the very complex needs of children they care for.

Safeguarding is firmly embedded in training and in foster carers' assessments. Research-based and therapeutic training helps carers to manage children's behaviour that results from abuse. Meetings include discussions on topics such as county lines and online safety to ensure that everyone fully understands the risks that children face.

Children are supported to develop a strong sense of safety and well-being. Those children with a history of going missing from care and, therefore, who have put themselves at risk have either stopped going missing or significantly reduced the number of times they go missing.

Managers and supervising social workers are proactive and use recent research to drive their practice. For example, the agency recently conducted extensive research to inform safeguarding practice to support a young person who was at risk of honour-based violence and forced marriage.

Supervising social workers ensure that the staying put arrangements for young people over the age of 18 receive the appropriate focus and consideration to safeguard adolescents as they move into adulthood.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The management team and social workers are ambitious and innovative in their practice. They are motivated to keep learning and developing to improve the lives of the children they care for. All staff in the agency practise from a strong theoretical background, which continues to be enhanced by research and current practice developments.

Managers, social workers and foster carers are highly focused on the needs of the children in their care and prioritise their needs. The agency has excellent systems to quality-assure and monitor its performance. The high level of monitoring by the manager ensures that they target the resources where they are best needed to improve children's well-being.

There is an excellent continuity of staff. This is a strength of the agency and results in a high level of consistency for foster carers and children. Children develop strong relationships with supervising social workers who advocate well on their behalf.

The agency provides strong challenge to partner organisations to ensure that improvements continue to be made to the quality of care and in strengthening positive outcomes of children. Supervising social workers are swift to challenge local authority social workers when they are not providing adequate support to the children they place with the agency.

Staff have access to a wide range of training, including specialist training, using established theoretical models. This ensures that staff have the knowledge and understanding to successfully support foster carers and the children they care for. Staff supervision and appraisals are comprehensive and reflective.

The fostering panel is challenging and highly effective. It provides a strong quality assurance function. The agency decision-maker makes reasoned decisions, with clear qualifying determinations.

Managers, social workers and foster carers work exceptionally well in partnership with other professionals. All are positive about the support, communication and advocacy they see the agency providing for children and young people. One placing social worker stated, 'I have been working with Priory agency for 18 months and have been impressed with the professionals I have worked with... Communication with the agency has been of a high standard.'

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 differences 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

Unique reference number: SC033934

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Registered provider address: 80 Hammersmith Road, London, Middlesex W14 8UD

Responsible individual: Shelley Whiting

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Inspector

Sue Young, social care inspector



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