

# Rainbow Fostering Services Limited

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Rainbow Fostering Services, Unit 10, Churchill Court, 58 Station Road, North Harrow, Harrow, Middlesex HA2 7SA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Rainbow Fostering Services is an independent fostering agency based in Harrow, Middlesex. It provides placements across London and Kent. It operates under one registration from its main office in London and has satellite offices in Bedford, Birmingham, Manchester and Portsmouth.

The agency provides a wide range of placements, including short- and long-term, parent and child, respite, planned and emergency placements.

At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing placements for 120 children in 102 fostering households.

**Inspection dates:** 14 to 18 January 2019

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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:** 26 January 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- From their starting points, children make exceptional progress in many aspects of their lives.
- Children live in stable and safe homes. They make excellent progress due to the determination by agency staff to make the most suitable match for each child. Children develop positive relationships with their foster carers and the rate of unplanned endings is low.
- Foster carers are dedicated and resilient. Many of the children in placements stay under permanency arrangements and find their 'forever home'.
- High-quality research-informed practice helps to safeguard children.
- A high value is placed on ensuring that children's educational and health needs are met. Children receive excellent emotional and practical support. This leads to them engaging well in education and having their health needs very well met.
- Strong leadership and management, well-supported and highly motivated staff and a child-focused ethos ensure that children remain at the heart of the service.
- Excellent partnership working and appropriate information sharing ensure that children receive a consistent approach to their care.

## Inspection judgements

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

This agency ensures that excellent care and support are provided to all of the children placed with it. A key strength of this agency is the quality of placements. As a result, children settle well, they are safe, they make secure attachments and they thrive. Placement stability is a significant factor in enabling children to achieve positive outcomes. Over 45% of children have lived with their foster carers for more than two years. The percentage of unplanned endings is low. A strong commitment to children, excellent matching and placement support all play significant roles in achieving this level of stability.

The physical and emotional health needs of children are well supported by their foster carers and staff at the agency. Foster carers excel in supporting children in all aspects of their well-being, and this is underpinned by high-quality training. Several children have additional needs due to physical or learning difficulties. Carers have excellent skills in supporting children with such needs. Professionals commented on the assessment of one child who was not expected to talk or walk. However, due to the perseverance of his carers in understanding his medical needs, together with their robust advocacy with all professionals on his behalf, he now has exceptionally good communication skills and interaction with others. This independence has opened up many more opportunities for him. A recurring theme during this inspection was how strongly carers advocate for children. A professional wrote, 'The ethos of the agency is inclusivity... working with all children irrespective of difference is evident in all their work and communication.'

Foster carers are clear about the difference that they make to children's lives. They have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of each child and of how they support them to make improvements in all areas of their lives. Certificates and awards reflect how children are making significant progress in their emotional stability and well-being, in keeping themselves safe and in their educational progress. For some children, to be able to concentrate and engage in educational activities are very significant achievements and contribute to increased self-esteem.

Foster carers are well trained and fully engaged in promoting children's education. Carers place great value on education and work closely with education providers to ensure that children make progress. All children, apart from some of those who are newly placed, are engaged in educational learning and are doing well. All children achieved good exam results for 2018, with one child attaining the highest levels of GCSE grades 4–9 in her placing authority. Children have high aspirations for their futures. Some have progressed to university, the army, apprenticeship schemes or are reaching their potential in other ways. All achievements, for both placed children and birth children, are recognised at yearly award ceremonies.

The recruitment of a participation worker has proved highly effective in supporting placements, as well as improving children's participation in the agency. Managers

place a high premium on understanding the views of children to improve service development. The participation worker acts as the link between the agency and children. He is often the voice of the child and represents the views of children in meetings with managers.

The participation worker is highly effective in enabling children to develop skills, relationships and independence. This includes a mentoring role, working with children who go missing and/or are at risk of exploitation. He engages children in a range of learning and enjoyable activities with the help of outside professionals. This has resulted in a significant decrease in episodes of going missing for many children. Through music, arts and dance, children are encouraged to develop their interests and hobbies. This has enabled them to make positive friendships, to develop skills and to improve their self-confidence. Children who previously lacked confidence and/or engaged in negative behaviours are now able to act as a mentor to others, to attend school and college and are developing their independence. One child wrote and recorded a song, which she sang at the agency's yearly award ceremony.

The agency works very closely with children to ensure that they contribute to all aspects of their care. This clearly works well. Children who spoke to the inspector said that they felt very much a part of the agency, as well as their foster family. Children play a part in the agency's recruitment process, as well as contributing their views on changes to the children's guide. Recently, children have engaged in training on staying safe, in completing their curriculum vitae and in a mock panel to aid their understanding of how foster carers are approved.

A high number of children have remained with their carers under adoption, special guardianship arrangements, permanency plans or staying put arrangements. This reflects how attached they become to their carers and the excellent progress that they make.

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

Children's lives are enhanced by the agency's excellent safeguarding arrangements. Research-informed practice focuses on giving children the best start in life through developing strong attachments. This emphasis on early permanence ensures that children have the stability, security, love and a strong sense of identity that enables them to flourish in their placements.

A young person commented, 'I lived in two other homes where I had no friends as I could not speak English. Since living with my new family, I have friends as they have been kind and helped me to speak English. My new family have said I am now part of their family and can live here for as long as I wish. This is a good thing.'

The agency takes a proactive approach to safeguarding. Assessments of foster carers include safeguarding and the management of risk. The agency has a specialist post overseeing safeguarding, exploitation and quality assurance. This ensures that the fostering agency benefits from expert knowledge and best practice.

There are excellent examples of children developing a strong sense of safety and well-being through discussions with foster carers and the agency's participation worker. One young person, who was involved in gangs and criminal exploitation, is now involved in a programme for young people who wish to move away from gang exploitation.

Local authority safeguarding officers confirmed that the agency has excellent safeguarding practices and procedures in place and acts promptly in a transparent manner when there are any concerns. Children who spoke to the inspector all reported feeling safe and said that they can speak about any concerns or issues to their foster carer. All the children said that they liked and trusted their foster carer(s).

Foster carers are very well trained in all aspects of safeguarding, including the risks of sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, self-harm and extremism. In conjunction with up-to-date, comprehensive written guidance, this ensures that they are equipped with the tools to recognise risk and respond appropriately. This knowledge is enhanced by training on brain development and attachment theories. As a result, foster carers have a better understanding of what may lie behind a child's behaviour.

The agency has an extremely well-considered staff and foster carers recruitment strategy, with a strong emphasis on safeguarding issues. From the point of application, rigorous and effective checks help to prevent unsuitable people from being recruited or having the opportunity to harm children or place them at risk.

The fostering panel is a strength of the agency. Members are skilled and experienced professionals, with strong leadership via the panel chairperson. They provide detailed analysis of the information obtained from the assessment process and make well-evidenced recommendations.

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

The registered manager has been in post since April 2016. He has used his knowledge and experience to improve the quality of care provided for children. All of the recommendations from the last inspection have been met. The manager is highly aspirational, and he leads by example. Children are at the centre of his practice and their measurable progress, in all aspects of their lives, is testament to this. The manager has a thorough understanding of every child's needs and their progress, despite the size of the agency. This is achieved through his highly effective monitoring systems and regulator consultations with his staff team, the children in placement and stakeholders. Commissioning officers speak highly of the agency and of the excellent standard of care provided for children.

The manager is constantly striving to develop new ways to promote and measure children's progress. A supervising social worker is in the process of developing a therapeutic programme for the organisation. Another supervising social worker is the delegated safeguarding lead, with responsibility for ensuring that all children's risk assessments are robust, fit for purpose and have clear and understandable

strategies to keep the children safe. The safeguarding lead meets with senior managers monthly to discuss any known or suspected risks to children and to re-evaluate the strategies currently in place.

Staff and foster carers feel valued and supported by the manager. He has developed good-quality relationships with foster carers and his staff team. All carers speak highly of him. They report high levels of management support and training. A new foster carer commented on a serious emergency with a baby during the night. The manager ensured that the baby received the necessary medical intervention, and he also arrived to support her. This re-enforced for her that she had chosen the right agency to work for. Foster carers all commented that the manager is always available to them. Carers refer to being part of a family around the child. This is best illustrated by a foster carer who said, 'Rainbow believe in children and carers. Therefore, we will always believe in Rainbow.'

Agency staff speak with passion and dedication about their roles and the successes of the children placed with their carers. Supervising social workers receive regular and valuable reflective supervision. Supervision and appraisal systems are effective. Staff's and foster carers' personal development plans inform training plans that are designed to maintain and develop their skills. Supervising social workers all said that they held manageable caseloads.

The agency has a very detailed three-year business development plan setting out realistic targets for the future of the service. The agency has developed an effective computerised database, which contributes to comprehensive monitoring systems that provide managers with immediate and up-to-date information on the progress of children and highlight any shortfalls that need addressing. Such systems have a positive impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of keeping children safe and contribute to better evidence recording on the progress of children.

The manager takes robust action to address all issues of concern, including complaints from children, allegations against foster carers and any poor staff performance. Furthermore, he has developed strong relationships with placing authorities and has managed to maintain these positive relationships despite, at times, having to challenge some authorities' poor practice and decision-making. He is a strong advocate for all the children placed with the agency.

The manager ensures that the agency is operating within the ethos outlined in the statement of purpose. This document is up to date and, combined with the agency website, provides useful information to external stakeholders.

## **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:** SC031621

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## **Inspector**

Juanita Mayers: social care inspector



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