

# Capstone Foster Care

Capstone Foster Care (North) Ltd

1st Floor Longford House, Hall Street, Heywood, Lancashire OL10 1DP

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Capstone Foster Care (North) is part of a privately run national fostering agency. It has offices in Heywood, Bradford and Barnsley. The agency offers a range of foster placements, including long-term, short-term, short breaks, parent and child and therapeutic foster care placements for children from birth up to the age of 18.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was supporting 84 children and 62 fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in December 2021.

The inspection involved both on-site and off-site activity. Children and foster carers were spoken to during the inspection.

### Inspection dates: 11 to 15 August 2025

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 7 November 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The majority of children in this agency have lived with their carers for a number of years and enjoy living in their foster families. Foster carers often view the children they care for as 'part of the family'. Most children who move on from their foster family do so in a positive way in line with the plan for their care.

There has been a small number of cases where children have not experienced the care and nurture they deserve in their foster families. Leaders and managers have taken immediate action to keep children safe and minimise the impact on children. However, the long-term implications of these experiences for children remain unknown.

Foster carers support children to maintain links with the people who mean the most to them. Foster carers and staff in the agency work flexibly to support family time arrangements for children to ensure that children remain safe while spending time with the people they love. Foster carers support children to understand and explore their religious and cultural identities.

Children and foster carers benefit from education professionals within the agency who support children with their educational attainment. Educational leads in the agency also support children's schools to better understand and respond to children's needs. This helps to bridge the gap when barriers to learning are identified.

The fostering agency regularly seeks feedback from children to understand what support would benefit them. The agency has employed youth ambassadors from the care-experienced children living in their foster families. These ambassadors contribute to children and carer events, as well as interviews for potential staff for the agency.

Foster carers provide children with vast opportunities to try different activities and visit new places in the world. The agency provides groups and events for children and carers to build relationships and enjoy something different. One child said of one of the children's groups, 'I like it. You can just meet other people and make new friends.'

When children struggle with their emotions and behaviours, the agency delivers enhanced packages of support to provide therapy directly to the child and to help carers think about the child's presentation through a therapeutic lens. There have been times when the placing authority for a child has not been willing to fund this additional support, at which times the agency has covered the funding to ensure that the child's home remains stable. When children have had to move on unexpectedly, the agency has continued to support some children to access therapeutic support.

When children leave the care of the agency, they can apply for discretionary funding to cover costs of attending university or moving into their own home. The agency's

care leavers' trust has funded items for young adults such as furniture, laptops, white goods, driving lessons and rental deposits. This funding is available to care leavers across the country, regardless of whether they have been cared for within the agency or externally. This helps to reduce children's social exclusion and disadvantages and enhance their life chances while promoting independence.

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

Children are seen regularly by staff in the agency and are typically provided with the opportunity to speak to adults away from their foster carers. Staff in the agency take children out into the community at times and take children to activities, which provides additional opportunities for children to talk to safe adults if they have worries.

Safe care plans identify key risks for children and families and provide strategies to keep everyone in the household safe. They are updated regularly to ensure that they reflect the current experiences of the child and family.

Social workers in the agency provide thorough assessments of the suitability of prospective foster carers. Social work analysis is robust, and key considerations are explored. This is bolstered further with strong scrutiny from an experienced independent panel with a range of backgrounds and perspectives.

Foster carer training is of a good standard and meets the development needs of carers. Foster carers enjoy a balance of online and face-to-face training, which allows carers the flexibility to attend training that fits in with their busy days. The agency seeks the views of foster carers to understand what training would be useful for them. When carers request additional training to meet the needs of the children they care for, the agency provides this.

When children go missing from home, they receive a quick and effective response to ensure their safety. The agency communicates well with other professionals to work together in the best interests of children. Managers have oversight of missing incidents to identify patterns and trends. Where carers have been unfamiliar with the process they should follow, the agency has supported them and reviewed their responses.

Carers rarely restrain the children they care for. When incidents have occurred, these have been reviewed by social workers and, if needed, additional safeguarding professionals in the agency. When shortfalls in carer practice are identified, these have been addressed with additional training and oversight.

Supervising social workers and managers in the agency work well with other professionals in the best interests of the children. When required, staff in the agency will challenge others to ensure that children are receiving the support they need. Leaders and managers attend regular risk management meetings, which helps to keep cases of concern at the forefront of senior managers' awareness.

When children make allegations of abuse against their foster carers, the agency responds quickly to ensure that children remain safe while concerns are investigated. When criminal charges have been made against foster carers, the agency has acted to de-register the foster carers in order to safeguard children. However, when evidence has not been found to demonstrate whether allegations are true, the agency has not always followed its own policy to seek independent scrutiny and oversight.

There have been two cases identified in which discussions and decision-making about allegations appear to focus on the needs of the adult rather than safeguarding the children. In these cases, immediate action was taken as described above, to keep children safe while investigations were completed. However, when the outcome did not substantiate the allegation, decisions were made to reduce carers' anxieties rather than considering that children may still be at risk. Additionally, when the agency has stated actions to safeguard children, such as increasing unannounced visits to families, these have not always been followed through.

The agency has an intention and desire to learn from serious cases. However, it is agency practice to wait until all investigations are concluded before completing a learning review. This has led to delays of, in one case, over two years before learning is considered or implemented into practice. This leaves children at risk if there is learning required to improve practice. There has been minimal learning or reflection discussed with the team throughout the period in which concerns have been raised about different families.

Most staff employed in the agency have full checks completed before they join. However, there has been one case in which an audit identified gaps in employment history almost 18 months after the worker joined the agency. Five months later, these have still not been addressed. This has not enabled the agency to ensure that all staff are safe to work with vulnerable children.

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

The registered manager is experienced and has the skills and knowledge to lead the agency. Leaders and managers are aware of the strengths and areas of improvement in the agency. They are keen to take learning on board when this is identified.

Staff feel well supported by the registered manager, as well as by senior leaders. Staff describe leaders and managers as approachable and available for advice and support. Foster carers know that there will always be someone in the agency who knows their family, even if their supervising social worker is away. This provides foster families with continuity of care.

Leaders and managers prioritise the well-being of their staff team and recognise the emotional impact their role can have, particularly through more challenging times. Social workers benefit from exceptionally low caseloads, which provides them the time they need to personalise their support to each family.

Staff are supported to continue their professional development. As well as training courses of their choosing, supervising social workers also complete the same training courses as their foster carers, to ensure that they can support the carers to implement learning. Additionally, all supervising social workers have completed training in level 1 of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy to better support foster carers to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma.

Management oversight of practice is mixed. In many cases, managers sufficiently support supervising social workers to provide the right level of support to families. Team managers attend challenging meetings to support their supervising social workers, and at times, co-work more challenging cases. However, in at least one case, a team manager failed to recognise that a supervising social worker had not documented their visits to foster carers for a full 12-month period. This meant that the records provided, leading up to a period where serious allegations had been made, could not have been fully accurate. This was not clearly challenged by the registered manager.

The agency benefits from an internal quality assurance team that completes case audits and internal inspections to improve practice in the agency. However, the team has not always identified shortfalls in practice, such as those identified above in management oversight.

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

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person 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>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that when consistent concerns arise, these are looked at as a whole.</p>	18 October 2025
<p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect, and</p> <p>sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that allegation policies are followed and the service follows through on intended safeguarding actions. Additionally, decisions around the management of allegations must be child focused.</p>	18 October 2025
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character. (Regulation 20 (1)(a) (3)(a))</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that at the time staff are employed by the agency, a full employment history is</p>	18 October 2025

<p>provided, together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment.</p>	
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for— improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulation 35 (1)(b))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must ensure that opportunities to learn from significant events are taken at the earliest possible time to ensure that children are kept as safe as possible, as quickly as possible.</p>	<p>18 October 2025</p>

## Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action must be taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 25.2)

## 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:** SC065333

**Registered provider:** Capstone Foster Care (North) Ltd

**Registered provider address:** Wootton Chase, Wootton St. Lawrence,  
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**Responsible individual:** Debbie Tomlinson

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## Inspectors

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