

Orchard Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Orchard Care (North East) Ltd is a small independent fostering agency based at the Tursdale Business Park near Durham. At the time of the inspection the agency was providing placements for ten children with nine foster carers. Additionally, a number of prospective foster families were undertaking the assessment process. The service aims to provide short and long term family placements for children aged between 0 and 17 years of age and provides a supervising social worker, an education manager and a teacher as well as support workers and clerical and administrative staff.

Summary

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff of Orchard Care for the way they helped the inspectors carry out the inspection. Two foster carers and a child's social workers completed questionnaires and these were very useful sources of information about the service. The findings of this report come from the questionnaires returned, from written information supplied by the manager as well as from the things the inspectors saw and the people they talked to when they visited. Inspectors spoke to seven of the nine approved foster carers and two young people and their foster carers were visited at their homes. A team of two inspectors spent two and a half days with the fostering service and gathered information by: Talking individually with children, carers and fostering staff Talking with a group of foster carers Interviewing with the manager and responsible individual Visiting foster carers' homes Reading children's, carers and staff files Reading records Reading panel papers and minutes Studying the questionnaires and other information sent back to us by various people. This inspection has found that Orchard Care provides a service that delivers positive outcomes for the children it places with foster carers. It communicates well with foster carers and placing social workers, provides good training and support for carers and works hard with placing authorities to make sure that children get the support and care they need. Nobody consulted during the inspection had any criticism of the agency and all spoke highly about the service it provides. A social worker described the agency's strengths as, 'Comprehensive reports, i.e. placement plan, risk assessment. Good communication between link worker, foster carer and social worker for the disabled children's service.' The agency needs to make sure all foster carers have received child protection and behaviour management training and ensure that foster carer agreements are completed more quickly after carers are approved. It should make some of its processes for monitoring foster placements and children's safety more effective. Foster carers said the agency's best features are, 'Being there,' 'I've never felt like I was on my own,' 'The service has a very child-centred approach which appears effortless while always underpinning all work carried out' and 'The service goes out of its way to keep continuity of care for children.' One carer said, 'As first-time foster carers we have been impressed with all staff and services received from Orchard Care. We have been made to feel valued and welcomed and have had all questions answered. The child-centred approach of the organisation is evident from the earliest meetings with them. The training offered prior to assessment was excellent, a very safe and comfortable environment in which to discuss and learn a vast amount in an easy format suited to all abilities.' Another said, '(The responsible individual) came out at 10:30 one night when I had real difficulties and would have stayed overnight if I had needed her to.' A young person spoken to said, 'I get all the help I need from (foster carer name) and Orchard.'

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the service has done a lot of work to respond to the requirements and recommendations made. The service has developed its foster placement agreements into very useful and comprehensive tools that help ensure carers get good information about children being placed with them. It has, also, worked hard to make sure it gets good statutory and other information about children. The agency has also done a lot of work to improve its recording systems. It now makes sure that detailed records are kept of the work it does with children, carers and staff. The service has developed an appropriate child protection procedure, worked with carers to develop individual safe caring policies for their homes and provided nearly all carers with first aid training. It has also developed its foster carer agreements so that they comply with the regulations and standards, improved guidance about diversity and equality for its carers and done some work to develop the level of detail in its statement of purpose.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency's foster carer agreement makes clear that carers are expected to meet children's health needs and the carers' handbook has good information about children's health needs and medical arrangements. Young people who were visited are registered with a doctor and carers are actively promoting their health. One carer was having difficulty registering a young person with a dentist because of the area in which she lived. The service is working with the young person's social worker to deal with this situation. Foster carers and young people spoken to gave examples of how young people's health is promoted, including getting support and training from Looked After Children (LAC) nurses and health visitors. The service supports carers to gain access to services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and occupational therapy. A carer said that, when a child with a disability was placed with her, there was an initial problem with the hoist supplied for the child. She said that, with Orchard Care's support, this was resolved within 24 hours. She also said that she also gets daily support from Orchard care support workers with some daily care tasks. The agency's foster placement agreement includes details of children's medical history and needs. It includes details of the child's last annual statutory medical, general practitioner details, immunisations. The agreement also contains a background chronology of the child's history that includes medical information where necessary. LAC documentation observed held satisfactory information about children's health. Foster carers told inspectors that all the children they care for have had annual LAC medical checks apart from one. A carer said that Orchard Care staff are aware of this and helping address this with the placing authority. Information supplied by the agency confirmed this. All the agency's foster carers apart from one have completed first aid training; the remaining carer had missed some training because of other commitments but is to undertake the training soon after the inspection. Carers have been provided with other health training including, sexual health, moving and assisting, training in specific medications required by children. Carers said they have, also, undertaken training in autism and epilepsy. The agency said, in its inspection self evaluation form, that it aims to encourage healthy eating. Foster carers said that they discuss healthy eating with each other and a young person said 'I get healthy food like fruit to eat.' The agency has not, however, provided carers with training in health and hygiene or healthy eating. A social worker said, about health support for children, 'This is addressed during placement agreement and at statutory visits to children on placement and addressed at contracts meeting and LAC reviews.' Foster carers said, 'We received information about appropriate

storage of medication, hygiene standards and information on appropriate available training' and 'Orchard Care give all the support training and information you need to look after children and young people.'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The service has recently appointed a new manager who had been in post for only a few weeks. At the time of the inspection an application for registration with Ofsted was being made. Children visited during the inspection are living in suitably furnished and decorated homes that are maintained to a good standard and are appropriate environments in which to bring up children. Foster carers made the inspectors welcome and cooperated openly with the inspection process. Health and safety checklists of foster carers' homes had been completed during their assessment in all three cases examined. Two health and safety checklists examined recorded that foster carers had pets and visits showed these to be dogs. The checklists stated that the animals did not present a risk but there was no supporting evidence of this evaluation and pet safety checklists had not been completed. The manager said that the agency has developed a dog safety questionnaire to be used. As none of the carers visited had been approved for longer than a year no update to these assessments had taken place but supervision records showed that safety matters are considered during these meetings. Foster carers spoken to said that initial training during the assessment process had covered health and safety and that such issues are given a high priority by the agency. No plans to provide periodic updates to this training were evident. Clear evidence of checks taking place on foster carers' driving licence, car registration, tax, MOT and insurance was available, but there was no evidence of home insurance or annual gas safety checks. A risk assessment is in place regarding the supervision and medication of one young person with a disability, but this had not been signed and the section setting out the planned date of review had not been completed. The agency works hard to get good information about children from placing authorities to enable it to match well. Files examined contain full LAC documentation about the young people that is up-to-date and well detailed. The agency's foster placement agreement form is very detailed and sets out clearly all the information needed by the carer to begin caring for the young person. It also ensures that the necessary arrangements for consent are identified and agreed. The agency uses a detailed referral form to collect information about the young person when the referral is made and the information gained is included in the foster placement agreement. Commendably, the placement agreement contains a section for a background chronology of the young person's history which gives a good understanding of the child's past and situation. The registered person said that the agency often produces this chronology itself based on information from the young person's social worker. Case tracking showed that placement agreement meetings take place before or, in emergencies, as soon as possible after the placement is made. One carer said, when a child was placed in an emergency, the meeting took place very soon and she was given the basic information as the placement was only intended to be for a few days. She was given more information when the placement became longer term in nature. In another file it was clear that the meeting had taken place prior to the placement and a number of introductory meeting and visits took place. Both situations case tracked provided evidence of some good work by the carers and the agency to maintain placements and promote placement stability. One placement had been particularly difficult for a carer as a planned move for the child had not taken place. All people spoken to said that it is vital that this young person moves soon into a long-term placement. File evidence showed, and the carer confirmed, that Orchard Care have provided excellent support throughout this period. The agency has policies

in place setting out its arrangements for dealing with child protection, behaviour management and unauthorised absence and the foster carer agreement requires carers to comply with these policies. Guidance for carers is included in the foster carers' handbook. Both foster carers' case tracked had a safe caring policy for the home in place. Both policies were specific to the young person in placement and one had been signed by the young person. Neither had been signed by the young person's social worker. The agency has developed a system for ensuring that checks on staff and foster carers are updated as necessary and examination of foster carers and staff files showed that the organisation is robust in checking new starters. The young people visited were clearly settled and relaxed in their placement. One young person said, 'I feel safe at home all the time.' Young people receive a children's guide which is produced in an accessible format and are also given a form and stamped addressed letter that they can send confidentially to the agency if they have any worries. The service has an effective system for monitoring and responding to any complaints or allegations made and the agency monitors the occurrence of any issues of bullying, unauthorised absence, restraints, accidents and illnesses. No complaints have been received by the service and one allegation made against a carer was dealt with appropriately. A young person said, 'I know who to speak to if I had a problem, it would be my carer or I could speak to Orchard or my social worker. I got a book thing from Orchard telling me about this.' Risk assessments are developed to help ensure that care is provided in way that is safe for children and meets their needs. A social worker said, 'A risk assessment is completed and a copy kept on children's files; this is addressed at LAC reviews. There is ongoing liaison via telephone calls and at visits between the foster carer, link worker and social worker.' A foster carer said, 'Risk assessments and safe caring policies and procedures are discussed at length. Detailed records given to be completed daily.' The agency has provided carers with behaviour management training with records showing that four of the nine carers have undertaken this training. A foster carer visited said that she had also undertaken this training but her name was not in the record maintained by the service. This training also covered bullying and there is challenging behaviour training planned to take place in the summer. Records of three staff members who had been appointed since the last inspection were examined during the inspection. This showed that the service operates a robust recruitment procedure. Applicants' proof of identity is checked and Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures sought prior to appointment. Additionally, references are sought from the applicants' last employer and full employment histories are gained that include the reason for leaving previous posts. These allow any gaps in employment to be identified and explained. Evidence showed that a telephone follow-up call is made to verify written references obtained. Records of meetings of the service's fostering panel showed clear discussion of cases presented to it and robust questioning and consideration of the information presented. Recommendations made to the decision maker are clear and specific and the panel provides feedback to the agency about the quality of information presented to it. Panel records showed that panel meetings held have been quorate and able to consider the business presented to them. A system of feedback is in place by which foster carers can complete forms to let panel know how the experience of attending panel felt. Carers described the panel as 'robust' and feeling 'separate from the agency' and said it 'tests out the agency's work'. One carer said, 'It felt like taking a driving test, I was really nervous but after it was over I wondered what all the fuss was about. The meeting was very structured and they all seem like nice people.' The agency has produced a leaflet containing photographs of panel members that tells carers about the panel and how it operates.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service has equality and diversity and equal opportunities policies in place. It provides carers with diversity guidance including dealing with ethnicity and disability issues in the foster carers' handbook. The foster carer agreement signed by carers requires that they meet the individual needs of young people as set out in their plan of care and foster placement agreement. The placement agreement includes a section for information about a child's background and culture and any care issues arising from these to be identified. Foster carers' assessments consider the applicants' attitudes and knowledge and abilities to work with children from different backgrounds and with different needs. The 'Choosing to Foster' training undertaken by all applicants as part of their foster carer assessment covers diversity issues and the agency has provided carers with subsequent diversity training. Discussion with foster carers and young people during visits showed that foster carers are supported by the agency to support young people's individual needs and to help them develop their own interests. There was clear evidence to show that a carer has worked hard with support from the agency to identify and meet the specific needs of a young person with disabilities placed with her. Appropriate equipment for the young person's needs was in place and a document called 'About Me' had been produced with the young person's input showing in pictures the young person's likes, dislikes, care needs and care plan. The carer concerned has attended training in therapeutic activities training to help meet the young person's needs. Assessments of the carer's home, local area and community environments accessed by the young person have been carried out to ensure suitable activities and services are provided. Young people's files contained evidence to show that a lot of work to support the education and independence of the young people is taking place. Visits to foster carers provided confirmation of this information as did discussion with the responsible individual and agency staff. A young person received help and early support from the agency to join army cadets and the service has contributed to the costs of school residential weeks for children. Carers said that Orchard Care's support workers work effectively with children both inside school and outside in terms of assisting with homework. They said that workers have developed good relationships with schools. One carer said that a worker now works more with a young person out of school because the young person had not responded well to support in school. Educational support workers help carers make initial visits to school, attend children's meetings and liaise directly about some educational matters. If children are excluded from school or are out of school for another reason support workers carry out individual work with them either at home or in the agency's offices to continue with the educational routine. At the time of the inspection a child, newly placed by the agency, who had never attended school was receiving one-to-one educational sessions five mornings a week provided by the agency until a school place is allocated. Work was being done to teach the skills needed to attend school and the expectations of classroom behaviour. The foster carers said that they could already see the progress being made by the child. Children's files contain information about their academic achievement including school reports, evidence of activities and successes as well as LAC records relating to education. Files seen contain up-to-date personal education plans (PEPs). The agency's teacher said that he often leads the work and discussions needed to have these plans developed on behalf of the placing authority. Both files also contained statements of special educational need and good levels of information about children's educational needs are included in the foster placement agreement. The responsible individual said that the agency makes clear to children at its first contact with them that school attendance is a 'given' and expected. She said that all support then focuses on maintaining this attendance

and helping the young person to achieve. At the time of the inspection visit all young people apart from the newest child was attending school and evidence showed the work to maintain educational placements. One young person said, 'School is okay, (support worker name) supports me in school. Some things about this are good but sometimes I could do better without her, she helps me sometimes when I don't need it and gets in the way. Makes me feel a bit different.' His foster carer explained why he needed so much support in school and said that the support worker tries to work with all children in the class so as not to make him appear so different; this was confirmed by an education worker. Carers consulted are all very pleased with the educational support given. One said, 'The young person and I get all the support we need in the home and at school.' A social worker was also very positive about the support for a child's education. Orchard Care's education workers take part in the initial assessment process for new carers by undertaking an assessment of the applicants' abilities and suitability to promote educational achievements for young people. They also present training on educational matters to prospective foster carers as part of the Choosing to Foster training carried out during the assessment process. The service does not provide short breaks for children living with their families.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency's foster placement agreement contains information about contact arrangements and, in the case of both young people case tracked during the inspection, this information is detailed and comprehensive. Another file showed how safe care issues arising from contact had been identified and contact arrangements made to deal with this. Visits to carers showed that they are aware of all contact arrangements and work to provide practical and emotional support for contact. Correspondence between the agency and placing authority on one young person's file showed how information about the change of contact arrangements was shared. It also made clear the agreements regarding who would take responsibility for supporting contact and providing transport. Recording by the agency and by foster carers within their daily records provides more evidence of contact and how carers respond to children to support them after contact. Records of children's behaviour are maintained before and after contact to help identify children's views and needs. A young person said that he has friends he can go out with and who are welcome to visit him in his foster home and other young people confirmed this statement. People consulted told inspectors of the range of networks children have with friends and the community and the range of activities they are able to undertake. It was clear from the inspection that individual children receive support in this area in a way that is specific to their individual need. Foster carers said that they feel that their views about contact arrangements are listened to, though one said a young person's social worker had rearranged contact without checking her availability. She said that, in this situation, the agency helped her respond to the social worker. Carers said that they often provide transport to and from contact sessions but that Orchard Care support workers or children's social workers help where needed. One carer said that it seems that carers have to 'foot the bill' for the cost of transport to contact if it was a long journey. Other carers disagreed, and said that support workers would transport children to contact in these situations. The responsible individual said that financial support is possible for contact over 20 miles away from the carer's home. The fostering agency provides good information for young people in the Children's Guide. This is an attractive document presented in a way so as to make it accessible for children and young people. This guide contains full details of how to make a complaint and both young people visited as part of the inspection have a copy of this guide. Commendably, children are given a form and

stamped addressed envelope they can use to send any concern, comment or complaint they have to the agency confidentially so it can be dealt with. Children are informed of the various organisations they are able to complain to or seek advice from. One young person said, 'I know who to speak to if I had a problem it would be my carer or I could speak to Orchard or my social worker. I got a book thing from Orchard telling me about this.' Carers said children are told who they can speak to, one said, 'Children always have someone to talk to.' Case tracking and discussions with a young person and carers showed that activities and care plans are based on children's wishes as well as their needs. Records showed that supervising social workers consult with children as part of their role working with foster carers and that support workers spend time with young people and seek their views. The educational support arrangements for one young person had been changed to accommodate his views and needs. Views gained from young people are taken into account and feed into their care plans and activities and direct work is planned including the views of children. Carers said, 'Activities are put on over summer so that children can meet up and spend time.' They said the agency 'would not mix children who do not get on together.' The agency also provides good support to enable children to take part fully in the decisions made about their care. Children are assisted to fill in forms and express their opinions for their LAC reviews. Carers said that LAC reviews can take place at their home, at Orchard Care offices or school depending upon the child's wishes or needs. Carers said that their views are taken seriously and they are able to express children's views on their behalf. A social worker said that children's views are heard by, 'Ongoing liaison with foster carer and link worker through telephone calls, statutory visits and LAC reviews.' The agency's process for carrying out foster carers' reviews includes seeking and recording the views of children about their carer for consideration by the fostering panel and children's views are sought as part of end of placement evaluations.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency has structured arrangements in place regarding payments to foster carers and the foster carer agreement sets out how payments will be made. Payments have been made weekly and carers said that this has worked well although one said one payment had been late. The responsible individual said that the agency is moving to a system for payment directly into carer's bank accounts and foster carers confirmed this. Foster carers' allowances exceed the Government's National Minimum Allowance. All carers were consulted during the inspection and nobody raised any issues relating to the level of payments or the arrangements for them to be made. Carers said that the level of payment and allowances enables them to allow children to undertake activities. In one situation the agency had contributed to the expense of a young person's school trip. A young person consulted said that he gets pocket money and allowances for clothing. The agency works well to promote young people's independence, helping support education and college placements for young people moving towards adulthood. The responsible individual said that the agency aims to develop services to help young people to progress into independent living as this becomes needed for children already fostered.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a statement of purpose in place which sets out the aims and objectives of the agency and the services it provides. This document has been developed since the last inspection but still needs some further development. Staff members' qualifications and experience is

presented as a group total rather than set out for individual staff members and details of the number of foster carers and children placed could be presented in more detail. Foster carers consulted said that they get good support and that there are enough staff to support them working within the agency for its current size. A foster carer said, 'The service communicates very well with us and outside agencies' and another said, 'They work hard and do a great job.' There is a clear management structure with a division of roles between agency's staff. Over the last year the agency has been without a manager but has recently appointed a new manager and was, at the time of the inspection applying for this manager to be registered with Ofsted. During this time the manager's role has been split between the responsible individual and a full time and a sessional social worker. All parties spoken to said that, although things had been busy during this period, support to foster carers remained very good. A social worker and the new manager said that they had a very thorough induction to the agency and receive very good levels of professional and managerial supervision. The social worker said that training is available; she received training in carrying out assessments of foster carers from an experienced worker and plans to undertake post qualifying social work training now she is settled into her post. This worker said that her workload increased when another supervising social worker left the agency and that for time the service was short of administrative time due to the health of an employee. She said that this caused some difficulties in ensuring recording was of a high quality but that this was now resolved and the priority of supporting children and carers was not affected. Foster carers confirmed they had received good support through this period and examination of records showed that the quality of recording remained at an acceptable level through this time. The agency's staff members are aware of the differences in role of the supervising social worker and placing social worker. They are able to work effectively to support children's social workers while ensuring that the main responsibility for the child lies with the placing social worker. A supervising social worker said that usually the working relationship is good with placing social workers. A young person's social worker confirmed this saying, 'There is ongoing liaison and communication through telephone calls and visits to foster carers and client. Supervising social workers attend LAC and education reviews.' The agency has good arrangements for undertaking robust assessments of prospective foster carers, often called Form F assessments. Of two earlier assessments examined one was thorough and well evidenced, the other had been the subject of change of social worker. This assessment had a section added when it was submitted to panel giving additional information and explaining why the assessment was not as thorough as some others. Despite this, the assessment was of acceptable quality. Panel identified a minor inaccuracy in the assessment report but missed another, though this was not a significant matter. Both assessments contained evidence of very thorough checking of the background of the applicants. Checks with CRB, the local authorities in which the foster carers had lived and the National Society of Prevention to Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) had been undertaken and references sought from four people, two of whom had been visited to gain further information. The service has recently developed a new assessment format with input from its fostering panel. A new assessment using this format was examined and found to be very thorough. The reports contain a very good, qualitative description of the applicants' competences and suitability and a robust analysis of the information gained. The records of the visits undertaken to the applicants' referees were, in this assessment, extremely thorough. The agency's teacher contributes to the foster carer assessment process and produces a report as part of the information presented to panel that assesses the applicants' abilities, competencies and attitudes regarding their role in contributing to and promoting young people's education. Records of the visits to applicants' referees seen were not signed by the referee or supervising social worker so it was not possible to be sure that the information contained is an accurate

record of the conversation that took place during the visit. Foster carers said that the agency was very prompt in handling their initial enquiries and provides good training to prepare people to foster. Carers said that assessments are thorough and challenging while still being a positive process with the workers being approachable. One carer who had transferred from another agency said, 'My assessment felt okay I had been assessed before with another agency but the new assessment was still very thorough. I knew it needed to be to be done right, redoing checks like medicals and CRB was a nuisance but had to be done.' Carers said that the 'Choosing to Foster' training as part of the assessment process is thorough and gives good information in a challenging way. One said 'It took me out of my comfort zone' and another said, 'Quite a lot of people drop out during the training. Week three scares them off, it's about sexual abuse, if people get to week four you know generally they will finish the training.' Experienced carers are involved in presenting some of the training in these groups. One said, 'We always present the worst case so that we are not giving carers false impressions.' Carers said this training takes place over four full days, one day per week. The agency has good arrangements in place to support and manage foster carers. Foster carers receive a handbook, a daily diary for recording the children's progress and care provided and a lockable box to store this recording confidentially. Carers sign to acknowledge receipt of these items. Because the agency has only been operating for a year the first foster carers' reviews were being planned but had not taken place. Carers spoken to were aware of the process for reviews and were starting to plan for them with their supervising social worker. Foster carers' records about the children they care for observed were suitably detailed and informative but were not structured in a way to ensure that all the Every Child Matters outcomes for children are covered in the record. Foster carers consulted said that they get very good support from the fostering agency and the responsible individual. Carers said things like, 'You always get (responsible individual), if she can't help she will get the relevant person,' another said '(Supervising social worker) is like that also – they are there on their days off.' Very good out of hours support was also reported from all the agency's carers. A few carers said that staff changes among the agency's foster carer support workers had meant that the same person did not always provide the support to the child and carer but that someone always came when they were supposed to. They said that his situation had improved recently. Carers said that they meet regularly in a foster carer support group which has both a support and training element. They said that there had been a gap in the meetings of this group in the summer and autumn of 2006 because of staffing changes. Records confirmed this but carers said that individual and informal support arrangements were good and they had never felt a lack of support. The agency has recruited carers specifically to provide respite care for other carers. This system was well regarded by foster carers spoken to, who said that it works well and allows children to make good relationships. One carer said the agency 'go out of their way to keep continuity for children.' Records showed and foster carers and staff members confirmed that supervision takes place regularly. The agency sets out that every third supervision session should include the secondary carer if there is one. Foster carers said that supervision is planned a year in advance and forms completed to rearrange meetings where necessary; records confirmed this. The agency also plans to undertake appraisals of foster carers alongside its foster carer review process to focus on developmental issues for carers. Foster carers and a supervising social worker said that foster carers receive unannounced visits from their supervising social worker but recording in the files examined was not good enough to evidence this sufficiently. Foster carers all have foster carer agreements in place which reflect the terms of their approval. The file of one carer contained a letter 'exempting' the carers from the terms of her approval so as to allow her to care for a disabled young person older than the terms of her approval. The decision to allow this was appropriate and well documented. The

foster carer agreements in the files examined were dated round three months after the carer's initial approval. The foster carer agreement forms used are comprehensive, detailed and useful documents carers did not have children placed until after the agreement was made but three months is too long a period to wait before these agreements are made. The manager has an effective system of monitoring the activities of the agency. The agency has provided its foster carers with a significant amount of training in its first year of operation. Training has been provided in first aid, diversity, moving and handling, challenging behaviour (including bullying), child protection, sexual health and therapeutic activities. The agency has made a good start and needs to continue to work to make sure all its carers have up-to-date challenging behaviour and child protection training. The agency's training records did not reflect all the training that some carers said that they had undertaken. For example, some carers said that they had been provided in training in autism and epilepsy but this was not recorded in the training record. Similarly, a carer said that she had done the challenging behaviour training but this was not recorded in her file. Foster carers said, and the responsible individual confirmed, that the agency is arranging to make National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 training available to its foster carers. Children's files examined contained detailed, accurate and up-to-date information about the children placed. Both files seen have full LAC documentation in place and copies of the child's reviews records. Files contain PEPs and statements of special educational need where necessary and the agency's own foster placement agreement contains very good information about the young people. One young person's file did not contain a chronology of events but evidence showed that this was being developed for the agency by the young person's social worker. One young person with a disability had been involved in the development of a document called 'About Me' containing a lot of information about the young person's needs, background and likes and dislikes in a pictorial and easily accessible format. The agency's general record keeping is effective with good records of the manager's monitoring of matters set out in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and those matters requiring notification under the above regulations. Staff records are comprehensive as are foster carers' records, records of panel minutes and foster carers' approval history.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
22	must ensure that foster carer agreements are completed and signed by all parties as soon as practicable after the foster carer's approval. (Regulation 28)	20 July 2007
9	must ensure that all foster carers undertake child protection and behaviour management training. (Regulation 12)	20 July 2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- should provide carers with training in health and hygiene and healthy eating.

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- should complete a specific pet safety questionnaire in respect of foster carers who keep pets in their home.
 - should provide periodically updated health and safety training for foster carers.
 - should ensure that risk assessments are signed, dated and have clearly identified dates for review.
 - should seek the views of children's social workers when producing foster carers' safe care policies and seek their signatures to confirm this.
 - should develop the statement of purpose of the agency to include more detailed information about staff members' qualifications and experience and the number of foster carers and children placed.
 - should ensure that records of visits to the referees of people being assessed as foster carers are signed by the referee so the accuracy of the record can be evidenced.
 - should consider structuring the foster carers daily recording sheets to ensure that recording covers all the Every Child Matters outcomes for children.
 - should make sure that all unannounced visits to foster carers are clearly recorded as such.
 - should ensure that the training records maintained by the agency accurately reflect the training undertaken by carers.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.