

Vision Fostering Agency Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Alex Turner
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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

Vision Fostering Agency Ltd is based in Dartford, Kent and provides a wide range of placements for children and young people, including: emergency, bridging, assessment, short-term, long-term and parent and child.

Summary

The inspection was announced. All key National Minimum Standards have been assessed. Recommendations included in the last report have been followed up. The service is well managed, is engaging in a process of continuous development and improvement and provides sound social work and fostering practice.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were five recommendations included in the last inspection report. Action has been taken to address each of these. The manner in which children's health needs and progress is recorded has been improved. The service is doing more to ensure information about children placed in an emergency is obtained in a timely manner. Monitoring systems regarding educational achievements have been and continue to be developed. Formal systems to obtain the views and opinions of the birth children of foster carers have been implemented. Children's case files and carers' files have been reviewed to help ensure the contents within are of the same good standard.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted. Children are routinely registered with, and helped to access regular and specialist health care services. Children benefit from foster carers that promote physical activity and a healthy diet. Care leavers are provided with information and advice about personal health and staying safe.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Checks carried out during the assessment and review of foster carers' suitability takes into account safety issues in and around the foster home. Social work staff carrying out these checks had not in all cases undergone training to do so. Children benefit from a service that matches them well with foster carers. Placement stability is good. Where possible introductory visits and meetings have occurred. Respite is planned to help minimise any disruption caused. The service safeguards children from harm and neglect. Training for foster carers covers safe care and safeguarding children. Safe care guidelines were written though the extent to which these were being discussed with children and their social workers was not clear. Risk assessment and strategy planning prior to some decisions was poorly recorded hence appeared to be lacking. An instance of alleged bullying was not picked up until some time after it was disclosed and then any action taken not recorded. The registered provider maintains a detailed overview of allegations or complaints. Vision Fostering take care to only employ people whom it has checked

are suitable to work with children. The fostering panel helps ensure that the process to assess foster carers suitability is thorough and completed to a high standard. The panel perform a clear quality assurance function.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children benefit from a service that values diversity. Vision Fostering has been successful in recruiting staff and foster carers from a wide range of different cultures and backgrounds. Equal opportunities are promoted across many aspects of the fostering service. Children are supported to practice their faith and to take part in groups and activities which reflect their interests. Language and comprehension of written materials and the spoken word is considered though provision falls short of filling all the gaps. Children's educational achievement is promoted. Foster carers have established links and working relationships with schools and colleges in their area. Children are supported by foster carers that take an interest and participate in school events, meetings and extra curriculum activities. Extra tuition, English coaching and links with interpretation services have been arranged when necessary. Though information on progress and attendance is collected this was not reflected in the children's files.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are supported to continue or establish positive contact with family, friends and other people in their lives. Placement plans and care plans articulate what if any restrictions on contact have been agreed. Foster carers take an active role, sometimes supervising contact, writing reports, providing a venue, a meeting point or transport. The service has rooms within a contact suite located in the head office buildings in Dartford available if required. Working with birth families is covered in the training provided. Young people's views about contact are sought and one child's contribution to the newsletter on the topic provided a good example of how some children choose to do so. Children's views are sought and listened to by Vision Fostering. The means to do so include face to face meetings individually and in groups and forums, written comments such as at their care reviews and their foster carers reviews, encouraging preparation for and attendance to meetings. Children comment that their views are regularly being sought and listened to. There are though some children who may not benefit to the same extent from different modes of consultation being used as they might if their understanding of English was more developed. Whilst the children's guide is produced in a variety of languages there remain small groups whose language needs go beyond those which have been considered.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers understand that they need to provide all children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. Examples included work experience, college and further education, money management, and encouragement and guidance to learn domestic and personal care skills. Children receive set levels of pocket money and allowances, a proportion of which they are supported to save.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The fostering service has a clear statement of aims and objectives and works to ensure that it meets these. The children's guide to the fostering service is not suitable for all children fostered through the service. It includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children, though is not always provided to children as soon as they are fostered. It is necessary for the service to produce the guide in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children and the service is well on the way to doing so. The children's guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate and about how to complain. There is effective leadership of the staff and operation. The registered manager does not have a management qualification though staff are organised and managed effectively. There is induction, training, supervision and appraisal of staff and foster carers. The process to assess and approve foster carers is detailed and thorough. Assessments, approvals and reviews are managed such as they do not impinge on the time supervising social workers have for contact and support of foster carers. Administrative facilities and resources are in keeping with the needs of the service. Children benefit from having foster carers that are themselves supported by Vision Fostering. Supervision is regular and touches upon many different aspects of fostering practice. Contact between and in addition to supervision is also frequent and valued by foster carers. Support with meetings, appointments and engaging with local services and facilities, training and participating in support groups is all taking place. Foster carers have complimented the quality, range and accessibility of the support provided. Children benefit from a foster service that organises information carefully and keeps it safe. Case files for children and foster carers are comprehensive. Information retrieval is straightforward. Whilst overall, the fostering service records are maintained diligently there are gaps in the information being sought and retained. Carers may use electronic means to record and send information but do so without the benefit of clear guidance in relation to data protection and security.

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
2	ensure the manager has a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by the NVQ Level 4. Regulation 7(2)(b)(i)	9 January 2008
25	maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2. Regulation 22(1)	1 December 2007

Recommendations

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

- ensure safe caring guidelines are developed, based on a written policy, for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. The guidelines should be cleared with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child. NMS 9

- ensure that people carrying out health and safety checks in foster carer's homes have received training to do so and have had their competence assessed. NMS 6
- ensure if the child has been abused or has abused another child, then the child's needs and the needs of all other children in the home are assessed before any decision is made to allow sharing of bedrooms. The outcome of that assessment is recorded in writing. NMS 6
- develop information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of the children and young people in their foster care services and to demonstrate the numbers excluded from school. NMS 13
- ensure suitable means are provided, frequently, for any child with communication difficulties including any arising from language or dialect to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment. NMS 11
- maintain in the case record for each foster parent approved by it a record of each placement with the foster parent, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination. NMS 24 Regulation 30(3)(a)
- compliment the childrens guide with additional information for mother and baby placements. NMS 1
- provide written guidance to foster carers regarding the management of information they may be storing and transmitting electronically. NMS 24

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.