

Anchor Fostercare Services

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

Anchor Fostering is an independent fostering provider based in Medway, Kent. The service supports foster carers in Kent, Sussex and London. Long term, permanent, time limited and emergency care placements are offered for children and young people aged 0-17.

Summary

The inspection was announced. All of the key national minimum standards have been rated. Requirements and recommendations made at the time of the last inspection were followed up. The fostering service engages in a process of continuous development and improvement and provides good quality care with some areas of outstanding practice.

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 improvements have been made in promoting children's health, panel administration, safe care, guidance issued to foster carers and the general standard of record keeping. A review of policies and guidance relating to the operation of the service has been undertaken. The ratio of administrative and social work staff to foster carers has increased.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted. Children are supported to access health care service. Health and development needs are assessed and means to help meet them planned, delivered and kept under review. Children are supported by carers who receive training and information in health, hygiene, first aid, health promotion, and substance misuse. Foster carers are aware of their role in promoting health. Children are able to keep track of their medical histories, development and health status by the records which are kept.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are placed with foster carers whose homes are suited to the purpose. Suitability of a foster carer's homes is considered from the time of the initial visit and onward throughout their careers. Regular supervision, reviews of approval and unannounced visits are all included in the means used by the service to help ensure foster carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. The stability of children's placements is promoted by a careful matching process. The service maintains up to date knowledge of carers strengths, gaps and circumstances. Care is taken to consider all known factors about children being referred and the potential foster carers prior to a match being put forward. When circumstances have allowed introductory meetings and visits have taken place. The fostering service works to protect children from harm, neglect and abuse. The service operates with a clear understanding of its role in helping to ensure children's welfare is promoted. Anchor Fostering have been successful in conveying to foster carers the role they have in helping children to stay safe, and provide training and guidance to support them to do so. Decisions and ground rules to promote welfare and safety are discussed and agreed with children. The fostering provider maintains a close overview of

practice. Anchor Fostering makes sure that the people who work in or for the service are suitable to work with children. The application and recruitment process includes procedures to determine suitability. The procedures were satisfactory though were not in all instances completed in full. The fostering panel contributes to safeguarding children and provides a quality assurance mechanism. The panel is constituted and operated in line with the regulations. Panel administration has improved in the last year. The panel is careful in its consideration of information presented and takes time to analyse, discuss and follow up enquiries before making any recommendations.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Anchor Fostering values diversity and promotes equality. Children's individuality is recognised and addressed from the point of referral and throughout their contact with Anchor. Children with a disability receive specific services including appropriate equipment and, where necessary, adaptation of the carer's home. Children are supported to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies. Children have the opportunity to participate in a residential holiday to try new activities, to improve self esteem, to make friends and share experiences with other children that have been fostered. Children placed with Anchor Fostering are encouraged to attain their potential. Foster carers contribute to the assessment of the child's educational needs and progress for the planning and review process. In doing so foster carers attend parents' evenings, open days, and discussions with teachers. Where necessary arrangements for suitable education outside mainstream provision have been made. Children's progress and achievement is monitored and their accomplishments are recognised.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children are supported to have positive contact with family, relatives and friends. Contact arrangements are discussed with children and foster carers. Where it has been agreed, contact is supervised. Supervision, training and support cover this element of practice. The opinions and views of children on matters affecting them, including day-to-day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis. The means to do so and topics covered are varied and include placement planning, face to face meetings, contact arrangements, activities and education. Anchor facilitates a regular Children's Forum which is run alongside an activity such as horse riding or ice skating.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are supported by foster carers who help them develop skills and knowledge necessary for adult living. The service provides training and information to foster carers that cover this area. A programme of life skills training is under development. The service delivers an award scheme that aims to recognise and reward skills in such areas as sports, healthy living, community involvement, work experience, expressive arts, relationships, citizenship, personal finance and enterprise. Young people have been assisted to gain college placements and employment.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The services provided for children are clearly described. Children receive information setting out what the service aims to do for them and information on how they can secure access to an independent advocate and about how to complain. The people who work for the fostering service are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to promote positive outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation. Children are placed with foster carers whose ability to provide appropriate care and support is assessed and kept under review. There is a clear assessment process leading to foster carers initial and ongoing approval. Qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering are considered in relation to a wide range of topics recognised as essential to the role. Children are looked after by foster carers who receive a good level of support to do so. Clear strategies to help develop foster carers skills and competencies are in place. Foster carers describe a service which is there for them when they need help and guidance. Written information is maintained to a good standard and is generally very well organised. Appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children. Though this is the case gaps were identified in the records kept for example in the children's register and the chronology of placements retained in foster carers files.

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
15	ensure full and satisfactory information is available in relation to all persons employed to work for the purposes of the fostering service as specified in regulation 20(3)(d)	19 December 2007
24	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. Regulation 30(3)(a)	19 December 2007
25	maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2 (1)(a-g). Regulation 22(1)	19 November 2007

Recommendations

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

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.