

Seafields Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jackie Graves
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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

Seafields is an independent fostering agency which was established in 1996. It operates from a main office in Hornchurch. The agency has incorporated Homefields Ltd, which provides permanent placements. Carers are widely dispersed throughout the home counties and additional offices operate from Newick and Newmarket. The agency provides a range of services including short and long term fostering for children between 0-18 years of age.

Summary

This inspection was announced. This was a light touch inspection focussing mostly on key standards. The agency continues to provide a child centred service with good quality placements for young people and children.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The Carer's Forum discussed how local authorities want 'Every Child Matters' to be interpreted. This clarified what is expected of carers in terms of providing children with savings and access to a computer/internet. Seafields has proposed the transfer to supported lodgings for some young people aged 16 to 18 where local authorities pay the carer directly and not the agency. This child-focussed action has enabled young people to remain in settled placements with carers and receive continuity of care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency checks that young people are registered with health professionals, such as a local GP, optician and dentist, to ensure their medical needs are met. Carers are supported to provide access to sources of information and advice regarding children's health, such as smoking cessation. Carers are encouraged to keep records of health and these are forwarded on to placing authorities. Young people have their specific health needs met, for example, with appointments for counselling/therapy. Carers promote young people's general health and well being through attention to diet and exercise. Young people are encouraged to be active and to join in physical sports and activities, in order to help them to be healthy and develop healthy lifestyles.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has clear systems in place to promote the protection of children. Training is provided for both staff and carers to help them safeguard children. Young people are encouraged to develop their confidence and self-esteem through varied leisure activities and hobbies. The agency provides a clear complaints procedure so that children know who to contact should they need to complain. Young people consider use of sanctions by carers to be fair and proportionate, helping them to learn from their mistakes. Information regarding bullying, complaints, discrimination and children's rights is made available. Young people are encouraged to seek help from various sources if needed. Seafields ensures that carers provide a comfortable,

homely and clean environment for young people. Annual checks of the premises, on pets and on the suitability of vehicles used to transport children, are carried out. Records show that robust, recruitment procedures are followed to establish that staff are suitable people to work with children and families and possess the appropriate, professional qualifications. Where any children's needs can not be fully met by the family in which they are placed, arrangements are made to address this, such as by creating contacts from specific minority groups to befriend a child. Panel scrutinises the assessments of carers in order to ensure that all possible information about them is available and explored. The opinions of people brought before panel are sought so that the quality of their experience can be monitored.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Education is given a high priority; most children placed with Seafields have a school/college place and carers help children to aspire to improve what they can achieve. Carers support children's education by providing suitable places for study, arranging private tuition if necessary and by attending school meetings. They are also proactive in finding an appropriate school place for children. Carers work hard to ensure children attend school regularly and work closely with schools to help children keep their place when this might be threatened. Carers promote the wider education of children by arranging social and recreational activities, trips out and holidays. Children and young people are encouraged to try new activities and interests, with support provided to access school holiday programmes. The agency ensures that carers and supervising social workers develop children's confidence and self-esteem. Where a placement does not fully reflect a child's background, steps are taken to address this.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency provides carers with guidance on maintaining appropriate contact, so that children may keep in touch with family and friends when this is suitable. Contact arrangements are discussed with young people and any impact contact may have on them is recorded and reviewed. Facilities for contact are provided within the office premises if local authorities wish to make use of this and provides a familiar setting to children. Seafields seeks the views of carers, children and young people and local authorities about the service it provides. It ensures that carers listen to the views of children about their day-to-day lives and their futures. Interaction between carers and young people was seen to be warm and supportive, with carers taking a real interest in children's interests and encouraging them to achieve their goals. Carers are good advocates for the children they care for.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency provides clear guidelines so that carers know what allowances they can expect to receive. Details are given of how allowances are broken down, such as for clothing and pocket money, to provide a good standard of living for young people. Carers receive their allowances promptly. The agency expects carers to save on behalf of young people, in order to provide some financial security for their future; details on how to administer this savings scheme are being developed.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Carers are very positive about the 24-hour support they receive and feel this is consistently provided. Seafields ensures regular supervising social worker visits, training/support groups and a Foster Carer's Forum to help develop skills and confidence. There is an expectation that all carers will update their skills by attending training/support groups but not all attend regularly. The agency has looked into ways to address this, such as offering incentives, training outside of normal working hours and information logs which can be shared with a partner. Support is also offered to birth children in foster households so that their opinions on fostering can be expressed and taken into account. There are clear arrangements for the regular, structured supervision of carers. In addition to providing supervision and support for carers, supervising social workers also take on some of the roles usually carried out by children's social workers. This can involve visiting and speaking to young people alone, attending school meetings and arranging social activities to encourage friendships. Seafields provides clear written information, for adults and children, so they know what to expect from the agency. The children's guide gives young people information on sources of help and details on how to make a complaint or addressing bullying. The agency maintains information on children's files and ensures this is kept securely. Not all required information is on children's files, but the agency has asked local authorities for this and passes any information received on to carers. There are good systems to check on the quality of care provided to children. Staff are suitably trained and experienced to carry out their roles. Staff are well supported by management who are approachable and always available to staff. There are systems to support and induct new staff into the agency's ways of working and opportunities to develop professionally through training.

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
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Recommendations

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

- continue to try to obtain full information about the the foster child and her/his family to enable the carer to protect the foster child, their own children, other children for whom they have responsibility and themselves
- ensure where two adults are approved as joint carers, that both attend training

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.