

# Ethelbert Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Mark Blesky
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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**

Ethelbert Residential Fostering Services provides fostering and supported accommodation for children and young people and is part of Ethelbert Specialist Homes Ltd, which owns registered children's homes and schools. The fostering service office is situated in Cecil Square, Margate. In 2006 this company merged with an associate fostering agency. The organisation has increased in size by approximately 50%. This service offers foster placements for a wide range of young people with differing needs.

### **Summary**

This service is performing to an outstanding standard. This has been achieved by continued improvement over a number of years. The inspector found that regular review and development is ongoing in this agency and this has resulted in a sustained performance to this high standard.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This agency has maintained well managed and effective systems across most Key Standards over previous inspections. The systems and the operation have improved on every occasion and reviews that have been carried out have always focussed on the correct elements where improvement was needed. This agency is very supportive to the inspection process and responsive to areas where shortfall maybe identified. At this inspection the continued effort and subsequent review has collectively resulted in effective systems that have successfully developed to inter-relate and compliment the organisation as a whole. Whilst invariably there are always areas which could continue to improve, this service has achieved the necessary standard to provide positive and successful outcomes for children and young people. This service is performing outstandingly.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has well maintained policies procedures and practices that address the young people's welfare effectively. Specific training is identified along with other mandatory health care training for all carers. The fostering service has made appropriate links with health professionals and maintains regular contact with the Looked After Children (LAC) nurse. This serves to underpin effective healthcare consultation for all the young people. Health records are very well organised with each young person's file equipped with a health profile and a pen picture of their current health needs. The carer's handbook directs that all carers are expected to keep records of all medical treatment. Records are kept of each child that has undergone treatment including medication taken, appointments, check ups, notes on general health along with well-being and any therapeutic input. Young people's files contain clear and legible records of all medical interventions. Young people that are fostered by this agency have a high calibre of healthcare support. Sampling of documents and discussion with the agency staff confirm that this service provides outstanding healthcare support. Training induction, refresher training, and specific training is also been deployed where a specific health need has been identified. This training serves to equip the carers with the necessary skills to provide effective healthcare monitoring and support. Initial health assessments information and relevant referral information

is faxed or emailed to the carer at the first opportunity. The placement agreement contains all the young persons health needs. Any information that follows a placement which was not available at the time, is sent from the placing social worker to the supporting social worker and then this is assessed and discussed with the carer. This provides up to date comprehensive information maintaining good healthcare. Sampled files are very well maintained and gave some excellent examples of the health needs of young people being met and maintained. Foster carers pass on all health information to the supporting social workers through day/weekly notes. The agency is currently introducing the Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care Part of the Children's Workforce Development Council.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff employment documents are well maintained and kept in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Records sampled contain typically robust reference checks and appropriate recruitment practices. All staff have appropriate Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks in accordance with the relevant guidance. Some minor gaps were noted in one staff file. The agency maintains effective systems of recruitment to safeguard and promote the young people's welfare. The fostering agency carries out regular and frequent checks of all foster carers homes to ensure homes are appropriate and suitably well maintained for all young people. All foster carer homes have a health and safety check of their premises which is carried out by the agency. Guidance is provided for all foster carers on the expectations of the agency in terms of what the carers will provide in their homes and this is assessed by agency staff. Homes visited by the inspector are well furnished and maintained and each home is furnished to appropriate standard. Young people spoken to are complimentary about their homes and bedrooms and understood their rights in terms of their accommodation and care. The matching process of young people's placements is well organised. Case tracking confirmed that appropriate considerations were being made for all parties. Matching considers the needs of the new child as well as the skills of the carer and the young people or indeed birth children that are already present in the home. Matching is a well organised and effective process. Training programs are designed by the agency and these are effectively delivered to carers. Both mandatory and specialist training is delivered consistently. Training programs were noted to be insightful and well organised. Carers stated that the training program is well organised and appropriate topics are developed. Carers feel training was very valuable and assisted them to develop their professional role. The panel meets regularly and performs the functions on behalf of the agency. Recruitment and reference checks are carried out on all panel members. Panel members meet appropriately to conduct their business on behalf of the agency. The panel was attended by the inspector during the inspection of the agency. The panel, whilst performing appropriately over a range of activities, produced little evidence to adequately demonstrate its quality assurance function.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The service provides guidance and training on the importance of valuing diversity and covers elements such as gender, ethnic origin and disability. Sampled documentation provides evidence that awareness of diversity and differing cultures are underpinning principles of good practice. Training programmes that specifically address valuing difference are mandatory and carers are encouraged to contribute to developing this training. All documentation sampled demonstrates

an awareness of the underpinning principles of equal opportunity. This approach ensure that young people's differing needs and cultures can be recognised and valued. The agency actively promotes the education of all young people. Training and support is given to carers to ensure they are able to provide. This ensures that the greatest support to young people is provided to encourage and assist them in their educational pursuits. Young people's files detail their current educational profile and the practical arrangements that are made for their schooling. Carers files also detailed essential information and the role of the carer in supporting the young person in school. This agency and their carers maintain effective support for the young people's education. Young people are therefore supported well and encouraged to pursue educational routes. This agency does not provide short term breaks.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Contact for young people with their family and friends is valued by the agency and both practical and emotional support is given to the young people by the carers. Policies and guidance developed by the agency for the carers underpins the value and need for young people to have contact. Records of all contact are kept by the carers and young people are supported with both pre contact and post contact issues. The recorded contact allows sufficient information for assessment of the progress of the contact and is generally well maintained providing analytical information. Practical support may include supervision and transport and is facilitated by the carer in co-operation with the agency. Foster carers stated that support was typically well managed in contact arrangements. The agency regularly seeks the views of the young people and the foster carers. In addition to informal systems of communication via the carer and young people formal consultation is also arranged. This is arranged twice per year and young people are given consultation questionnaires to complete. These are collated and evidence was present where the agency has developed their systems and operation incorporating the views of the young people and carers. Carers stated that they were listened to by the agency and were able to effectively raise matters on the young people's behalf. To encourage young people to contribute the agency has a reward system of gift vouchers for completed questionnaires. This supports the importance the agency places in obtaining the young people's views and has been successful in promoting consultation.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

All foster carers are given training on the importance of preparing young people for independence. Young people that are on formal independency programs are monitored by the agency and this is subject to statutory review by their placing authority. There are clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. The manager demonstrated how this program continues to be developed and confirmed that some young people have a reluctance to work towards independence. The training that the agency provides for carers considers developing strategies to encourage young people's journey towards independence. All foster carers are paid an agreed amount in accordance with their contracts and terms and conditions. Currently this company has some carers that retained their original terms and conditions when this company merged. The written policies published by the company determine that allowances and special expenses can be agreed in order to meet the needs of the young people. The company has a procedure

to address any disagreement in allowances. Carers spoken to stated that the company pays the agreed allowances regularly and on time.

## Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering agencies statement of purpose clearly sets out what services are provided for the children who are placed by the fostering service. Education or health services, including therapeutic services where these are provided are detailed in the statement of purpose. This statement of purpose is published in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and is available for all staff, carers and the young people. The company has a structured and efficient staff team of qualified Social Workers that provide supervision to the foster carers. Support staff and administration personnel are appropriately qualified for their roles and there are sufficient numbers of staff to carry on the functions of the agency. Staff structures are appropriately maintained with a system of support with staff to deputise in the absence of the manager. The agency publishes guidance and procedural documents to detail the effective manner in which carers are supported. From sight of documentation and discussion with carers it was established that there are clear and effective systems of management and support for carers. All carers have detailed contracts of employment and sufficient guidance, instruction and training to support them in their foster care role. All staff members have annual appraisal and foster carer have their review through the fostering panel. All children and young people have comprehensive case records held by both the agency and the specific foster carer. These files are very well maintained and up to date. Records are accurate and insightful to the individual needs of the young people. Administration files are of high standard throughout the agency, demonstrating well managed and efficient administration support.

## 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):

- provide a quality assurance function at the fostering panel in relation to the assessment process – in particular to monitor and review the work of the assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems; and to ensure that there is consistency of approach in assessment across the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that it has been completed in a thorough and rigorous way (NMS30)
- ensure that staff records are maintained in accordance with schedule 1 with a full employment history, together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment (NMS8).

## 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.**