

Moments

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036518
Inspection date	7 August 2007
Inspector	Patrick Gough
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	11 September 2006

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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

Moments Ltd is an independent fostering agency based in Whitstable, Kent. Services that can be provided include long, short term and emergency placements, supervised contact and outreach for children not attending school. At the time of this inspection the service was supporting 22 children and had 41 approved foster carers. Information on the service for prospective service users is detailed in the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide.

Summary

This was an announced inspection to regulate the operation of the fostering service and to follow up on the action taken to address the requirements and recommendations issued at the previous inspection. The findings of the visit are based on the agency's application of the key National Minimum Standards and its adherence to the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The agency continues to maintain good standards of practice and is engaged in developing the service. The children benefit from the organised approach to maintaining health histories and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Good guidance, training and effective supervision of foster carers contributes to the safeguarding of the children. Isolated incidents where circumstances were allowed to develop, raise concerns about a lack of referral information for emergency placements, child safety risks and the communication of essential information about children prior to respite care. Acknowledgement is given to the rapid response made by the agency to address these issues. There is good support for carers and the children confirm that they are happy in their placements. The agency is enabling some young people to attain some meaningful targets towards the end of their formal education. The achievements, through the efforts of carers and work experience, have been attained through a focus on preparing young people for adulthood. There is good leadership and senior managers work effectively with the staff team.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Two good practice recommendations were made at the previous inspection. Both have been adequately addressed by the agency. A comprehensive training programme has been arranged for the whole year, giving adequate notice to carers to ensure attendance. The training needs of individual carers have been identified, and continue to be identified, through the supervision and annual review process. Specialist areas of training are provided. The panel members have been provided with one training session and another is planned. A new handbook has been compiled and contains all the information relevant to the work and responsibilities of the panel. Procedures relating to decision making is included in this.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

In accordance with good practice the agency has created a format to record all aspects of the physical and mental health of the child. The format, completed by the carer, contains valuable guidance on the importance of promoting a healthy lifestyle. It includes a range of charts to record appointment and clinic visits, and their outcomes, in chronological order. There is an outline, also, from birth to 16, of normal expected development, the impact of interrupted

development and how carers can support the child. These health booklets are generally completed satisfactorily. This information provides an audit trail of the carer's input and the impact on the child's health and life in general. The information is used effectively to inform monthly monitoring and reviews. The placement agreements relating to planned placements, but not emergency, contains useful medical histories and information necessary for further planning. Medical consents are kept on file. Health needs and issues are considered in the matching process. The service has good links with health agencies and has access to medical advice. The carers benefit from training on health related issues such as, mental health awareness, drug awareness and enhancing self esteem. This organised approach to health promotion gives a positive message and increases the opportunity for the children to live a healthy lifestyle.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The required checks are conducted through a thorough recruitment process ensuring that suitable staff are employed. The agency implements its recruitment policy and guidance in a robust fashion. The personnel records are well indexed and the content confirms that the process of selection is designed to safeguard the children. In practice, the agency demonstrates that it achieves this objective. Telephone enquiries are made to confirm the validity of the reference and to explore further, with the author, any anomalies or inconsistencies. The supervising social workers have an appropriate qualification and considerable experience of fostering practice. The staff have a good awareness of the legislation and guidance governing practice. On the whole, children are placed in safe and comfortable households, where they enjoy spacious and well equipped accommodation. The home is visited on a monthly basis and various checks are completed. Where supervising social workers identify weaknesses or deficits in placements, which could adversely affect the welfare of the children, these are addressed by the agency. The assessment process used to select competent carers is rigorously conducted. A competency checklist, completed during assessment helps to identify specialised training. Health and safety, safe caring and other safety related training feature in the agency's training plan. Where emergency placements are sought, the content of the referral information is weak. This compromises the safety of the child, any other children in the household and the carers. Where planned placements are made, however, referral information is generally comprehensive, useful and contributes to the matching process. The agency works closely with the placing authority, using the information in the child's care plan and the carer's assessment, to determine the most appropriate placement. Where possible, the introduction to the placement includes specially prepared pictorial welcome packs outlining the layout of the home and a pen picture of the family. Whilst the placing agreement contains all the other relevant information, it does not include the matching considerations. Additional training is arranged for carers where this is identified. The agency provides adequate training for carers on all aspects of child safety. The guidance in the foster carer handbook and in the numerous policies and procedures is sufficiently clear to inform carers about their responsibilities relating to safe care. The service keeps a log of incidents, accidents and any allegations relating to the children's safety and takes the appropriate action, where necessary. On the whole the agency takes positive action to protect children in placement. However where the placing authority fails to respond responsibly when a child is at risk, the agency is slow to act, thus compromising their safety. Whilst there are procedures in place to communicate information about the child, on some occasions there is inadequate preparation for respite care placements. The service managers take positive action to address inadequacies in their systems. The composition of the fostering

panel supports the acquisition of good placements for children. Panel membership consists of personnel who have a wide range of experience in child care and have expertise in health and education matters. The responsible individual is striving to extend the representation on the panel to include someone who has experienced foster care. The panel conducts its business properly and satisfies the requirements as indicated in the regulations. There is good critical analysis of prospective carers and appropriate deliberation prior to making recommendations to the decision maker. The agency has provided training and produced a comprehensive handbook for the panel members covering all the responsibilities, duties and tasks to be undertaken.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There is reference to the importance of recognising and meeting the diverse needs of children in the agency's documentation. Carers receive training in the skills to foster care. Other training, such as 'valuing diversity' and 'enhancing self esteem' puts the focus on the importance of recognising difference and helping children to feel good about themselves. Child protection training addresses discriminatory practice and guides the carers on how they can support children who experience this. The children's guide is available in several languages and the agency has access to an interpreter service when required. A mentoring service is provided when appropriate and where this has been implemented there have been very positive outcomes for young people. The majority of the children placed are in mainstream or special education settings. Agency documentation emphasises the importance of the children's access to full time education. It is proactive in accessing relevant education material on placement and works in partnership with placing authorities to sustain education provision. Where children are suspended or excluded from school there is an outreach facility to support the child with a programme comprising of some academic work, life skills and 'fun' type activities. Carers attend school meetings, contribute to 'statements' and personal education plans and support children with their homework. The agency is creative in its support for young people who find it difficult to respond to formal education and has successfully enabled them to re-engage in further education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The importance of maintaining contact, in terms of outcomes for children, is emphasised in carers' training and practice guidance. In considering appropriate placements, the child's access to their family and significant others, is given prominence through matching and geographical location. Positive partnership between the agency and the placing authority ensures that the child has regular contact with their birth family. There is financial support for the carer to transport the child to a contact facility. The carer keeps a written record of the occurrence of contact and the positive or negative impact it might have on the child. This information is disseminated to the agency and the placing authority. The children indicate that they are consulted by the agency and their carers. The agency distributes a 'worry list', on a quarterly timescale, to all the children so that they can indicate what, if any, issues are causing them concern. Relevant support is given to children to complete this exercise. Agency staff respond, through carer supervision or links with professional bodies, and take appropriate action on the responses. Where concerns, common to a group of children, are raised, the agency provides a corporate response such as, specific training for carers. Children are consulted prior to the statutory review. The children's guide contains information on how to complain and includes

addresses and telephone numbers if they wish to access an advocacy service or register concerns to an independent source. Supervising social workers consult with the children during home visits.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency demonstrates its capacity to provide opportunities for children to prepare for adulthood. Recent good work by carers has resulted in good outcomes for some children coming to the end of their formal education. Currently there is a focus on empowering older children through work experience and vocational training. A six week life skills assessment, in a question and answer format, designed to indicate the young person's abilities, is used to identify further learning needs. The lack of a life skills programme for children of all ages and ability range, which can be implemented on a daily basis, limits the opportunities for younger children until they reach school leaving age. The agency is, however, preparing to construct such a programme for carers to implement. In the meantime, awareness is raised through 'moving to independence' training and useful guidance in the agency's policies. There is a written policy on fostering allowances and further details are available to the carers through the foster care agreement. The carers are paid promptly and are given all the financial support necessary to adequately provide for the children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose was reviewed and amended in March 2007 and includes all the required details on the agency's objectives and how it proposes to achieve good outcomes for the children in placements. It is well presented, compact and in a format suitable for stakeholders to understand the agency's remit. The children's guide is in two formats, one for children over 12 years and another with the written text, supplemented by colourful cartoon pictures, for the younger children. The guide is available also in different languages. There is a clear management structure, which is understood by the agency staff. Each member of staff has a clearly defined role reflected in a job description. There is a recently appointed fostering manager and a business manager each with the appropriate level of knowledge and level of experience within fostering. Staff receive supervision regularly and this is regarded as purposeful and related to their practice and professional development. Currently, following the replacement of the registered manager, the manager is undertaking some field work. Recruitment is ongoing, however, with the intention of ensuring there are sufficient field work staff to allow the manager to focus on the coordination of the service. Current arrangements are satisfactory and the supervising social workers provide a good service to the carers. Qualified social workers conduct the assessments of prospective carers. There is a good programme of training and carers are expected to attend all sessions. The administration team provide adequate support for the field work team. There is sufficient policy guidance and processes are in place to support the practice. The agency occasionally arranges workshops, designed to create a better understanding of policies and procedures, for carer participation. There are sufficient carers with a wide range of experiences to meet the diverse needs of the children referred. The agency continues to recruit experienced carers with 'diversity' in mind. The written assessments presented to the panel confirm that there is a rigorous approach to selection. The reports are qualitative and contribute to successful decision making. Carers are clear on the arrangements in place to support their practice. Supervision, through home visits, are conducted by supervising social

workers on a fortnightly timescale. The purpose of the visits is clearly outlined and they focus on a format which reflects the daily care of the children. Written reports, indicating the level of discussion, achievements and highlighting need for action are produced and placed on file. The format of these is currently being revised to allow discussions on the child's development and progress to be submitted to the child's social worker on a monthly basis. Carers understand their commitment to ongoing development through training and attendance at carer support group meetings. The carers appreciate the benefits of information exchange at training and support meetings. The case records are up to date and effectively organised. They are well indexed and hold all the required information relating to the carer's practice and the child's history, respectively. There is a policy on case recording and carers participate in a 'record keeping and confidentiality' course. Carers are given advice on the proper method of logging information relating to the child's development. Confidential information about the child is stored securely within the placement. The agency office has a security alarm and the documents are stored in locked cabinets. There is training on 'life history work' and carers and children are encouraged to access their files. Supervising social workers check the children's logs, completed by the carers, when they visit. A member of staff has responsibility for completing an audit of the office files. Records of allegations and complaints are kept and monitored through the Regulation 42 process.

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):

- include matching considerations in the placement agreement
- access the relevant information from placing authorities, at the referral stage, so that adequate matching can be demonstrated
- take the necessary action in all instances to secure the safety of children
- ensure that carers, offering respite, fully understand the needs of the child so as to protect the child, other children in the household and the carers
- create and support the carers to implement a life skills programme for all children
- Provide for regular written contact with the child's social worker on the suitability and success of the placement.

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.