

ABC Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Suzanne Young
Type of Inspection	Key

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Responsible individual	Jennifer Foster
Date of last inspection	

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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

ABC is a private limited company operating as an independent fostering agency. One of its directors is a qualified social worker and has previous experience in managing a fostering agency. It was registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on March 23rd 2007. The foster care agency undertakes the recruitment, assessment, support and training of foster carers. It offers a number of different types of placements for children; emergency, short term, assessment, bridging, long term and permanent placements. These placements are provided to children and young people from 0-18 years old.

Summary

ABC is a new agency and this is the first inspection of ABC since it's registration in March 2007. Overall the agency is assessed as performing satisfactorily with some good aspects of practice seen. One inspector carried out the inspection over five days. During the inspection, the agency's policies and procedures were checked. The manager completed a self assessment and questionnaires were returned from foster carers and children in placement. One fostering household was visited and discussions held with the foster carers and children who were present. The files of two foster carers and four children and young people were also examined. Meetings with foster carers and the social work team took place and interviews were conducted with the registered manager and the responsible individual. The last three panel meeting minutes were examined and the panel chair was interviewed. The panel meeting for September 2007 was cancelled.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Not applicable.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's and young people's health needs are identified and met within the agency. ABC has a positive attitude towards the promotion of good health and wellbeing of children and young people. The health and development requirements of children and young people are considered during the referral and matching process. They have a health record which includes medical consent and details full immunisation history. The agency's matching form and foster placement agreement addresses the health needs of young people referred and health and development issues form part of the monthly supervision with foster carers. The agency has developed policies which help to ensure the promotion of children's health and wellbeing. This includes advice on drugs, alcohol, smoking and on sexual health. ABC has a policy on smoking. Where carers do smoke consideration is given to the risks related to passive smoking. Since the inspection the agency has restricted the approval age range in accordance with recent guidance which states that carers who smoke should not be approved to care for children under the age of five. ABC has a training programme in place to further ensure the health and wellbeing of children and young people placed within the agency. Young people's health and safety are protected and promoted through policies and procedures. Carers are expected to maintain comprehensive records of all medication administered and complete accident reports when

necessary. They are aware of the importance of the safe storage of medicines within the home and a policy has recently been developed regarding the safe storage and administration of medication which is due to be sent out to all foster carers. Although foster carers state the safe storage of medication is checked and insisted on by ABC, this has not been included in the health and safety assessment conducted by the agency. This has now been amended since the inspection.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's and young people's safety and welfare is promoted within the agency. ABC has systems in place to ensure that children are well matched to foster carers and to ensure the protection and safety of children. A matching pro-forma for all placements has been developed, which enables appropriate matches of children's and young people's needs to carers' skills. All referrals and matching of placements are made through a designated referral officer alongside the fostering manager. The agency has forms in place to record when unannounced visits are conducted and a system has been developed to make sure foster carers' transport is safe and appropriate to children's needs. The agency has a generic safe caring policy in place for each fostering household to ensure the protection of each member of the home. This is reviewed on the placement of a child alongside the foster carer's health and safety check and made specific to the individual child placed. This is good practice and ensures the individual needs of every child is considered. Where a risk has been identified a detailed risk assessment is usually completed reflecting the level of risk and actions to be taken to reduce the risk identified. A risk assessment however had not been completed regarding two unrelated children sharing a bedroom, potentially placing one or both children at risk. Although the manager said this was explored in the foster carer's assessment this had not been recorded. The agency further promotes the protection of children and young people by developing policies with regard to child protection and anti-bullying. The child protection policy however does not include the procedures for carers to take should they be concerned about institutional abuse by the agency. There is a programme of training events to cover areas such as child protection and managing behaviour. Good outcomes for children are promoted as foster placement agreements are in place at the time of a placement being made, including respite placements. This ensures all those involved are fully aware of the arrangements necessary to meet a child's individual needs. Although ABC has systems in place to ensure the appropriate assessment, recruitment and vetting of staff and foster carers, employer references do not ask the reason for leaving their employment. This could potentially mean children are placed at risk from staff unsuitable to work with children. The registered manager is competent and well motivated to manage a regulated service. She is child focused and supportive to both staff and foster carers. She is currently undergoing the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 4 in Management. The agency has its own fostering panel and has good policies and procedures to support the effective operation of the panel. The level of scrutiny demonstrated in the panel minutes evidence a quality assurance function is being provided by the panel to ensure good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. It is of concern however that the terms of approval of some foster carers do not accurately reflect their skills and expertise or number of bedrooms available for fostering. Although the panel chair has been deputising for the manager alternative deputising arrangements have now been put into place.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Children and young people placed with ABC are being encouraged to enjoy and achieve as staff and carers are aware of the importance of promoting individual needs within the foster placement. ABC fostering agency ensures the issue of diversity is considered during the referral and matching process. This is evidenced on the matching pro-forma and during placement. The issue of diversity is also explored during the foster carers' assessment process to ensure the appropriate awareness and values of prospective carers. Support is provided to trans-racial placements by giving foster carers advice when required, for example, directing carers to appropriate skin and hair care. Foster carers further promote children's and young people's individual needs by encouraging them to be involved in activities and interests. A valuing diversity policy is currently being developed. Children and young people are supported to learn and achieve. Staff and carers promote the educational needs of children and young people by having appropriate contact with schools and educational professionals. Foster placement agreements address the education needs of children and young people placed within the agency. The manager has set up systems to monitor the educational attainment and achievement of children and young people to ensure they attain their full potential.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Where appropriate, young people are encouraged and supported to maintain positive contact with their birth families. The requirements for contact are considered at the referral and matching stage. Contact with birth families and friends form part of the foster placement agreement and foster carers' supervision sessions. The importance of positive contact is emphasised on the skills to foster course and is supported through the carer's monthly supervision. The agency has developed forms for foster carers to complete during supervised contact entitled 'supervision of contact assessment forms'. This has been developed without training being provided to foster carers to provide them with the necessary knowledge and expertise. ABC ensures children's and young people's views are listened to. The agency's social workers meet foster children on a minimum of a monthly basis. The agency has set up a consultation process to gain the views of foster carers and both foster children and carers' birth children and plan to formally consult on a six-monthly basis. The agency also produces a newsletter to appeal to both foster carers and children. ABC ensures children and young people are aware of how to complain. A young person's handbook is given to all children placed which has details of how to complain and who to contact if young people feel they are not being looked after properly.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

ABC has a policy in place to help foster carers support young people prepare for adulthood and leaving care. The agency aims to introduce specific living care placements and conduct living skills assessments. Training in this area is due to be delivered next year. This will be inspected fully during later inspections. There is a written policy on fostering allowances which carers are aware of. The agency ensures that carers' payments are accurate and timely.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency has been registered since March 2007. The agency is organised in a way which delivers an effective service to children, young people and foster carers. The registered manager manages a small team consisting of a social worker and trainee social worker. Both directors

of the agency work in an administration and finance capacity. The agency is currently recruiting a consultant social worker to deputise for the manager in her absence. The agency has a positive impact on the care of children and young people. There is a Statement of Purpose that is issued to provide information to prospective carers. Children are informed of the agency's objectives and practice through a young person's handbook which includes an age-appropriate children's guide and agency complaints procedure. These have not been produced in a format suitable for children and young people with learning difficulties who are fostered through the agency. Documents and systems are in place to ensure children's and young people's wellbeing is safeguarded and promoted. The lines of accountability within the organisation are clearly understood and staff are provided with appropriate written contracts and information. ABC has structures and procedures in place to ensure the smooth financial running of the agency. The manager is collating information to comply with regulations and produces monthly monitoring reports. This process is still in its infancy. The manager and responsible individual recognises the need to develop a quality assurance system to encompass this monitoring and to evaluate this information in order to maintain and improve quality of care within the organisation and to promote the care provided to children. The office is situated in the centre of Tenbury Wells and was subject to flooding earlier this year. The agency has since developed a flooding policy and has procedures in place known to foster carers, staff and placing authorities should the same happen again. All files and confidential documents are stored securely above flood level to prevent information about young people and foster carers from becoming damaged. There is a clearly set out assessment process and training programme for foster carers to ensure carers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to care for children. The agency uses the new British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F to process assessments and uses a set of competencies to measure the skills and abilities of potential foster carers. Foster carers are well supported and benefit from fortnightly visits from agency staff which consists of one supervision and one support visit. This ensures that children and young people's care remains appropriate and is constantly review and evaluated. The agency also operates an out of hours system which foster carers can access. The fostering service maintains an up-to-date, comprehensive case record for each child and young person which details the quality of care provided and contains a good range of information in relation to their continuing needs and progress. The agency has a carers' supervision form and a young persons' supervision form which is detailed and is developed around the outcomes in 'Every Child Matters' ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people. The benefit of these forms are at times compromised by their limited completion.

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
9	undertake risk assessments when children are sharing bedrooms. Regulation 11.	31 October 2007
30	ensure carers terms of approval accurately reflect their skills, training and home situation. Regulation 28.	31 October 2007

15	follow clear procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff/foster carers to ensure children are protected. Regulation 20.	31 October 2007
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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):

- amend carers approval to reflect recent guidance regarding smoking. Standard 12.
- amend the child protection policy to include the procedures for carers to take should they be concerned about institutional abuse by the agency. Standard 9.
- provide training to foster carers with the necessary knowledge and expertise to assess contact if required. Standard 10.
- develop children's guide, complaints and consultation forms in a format suitable for all children fostered through the agency. Standard 1.
- ensure full and detailed completion of foster carers and young people's supervision forms. Standard 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.