

# Foster Care Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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**

Foster Care Services Limited is a fostering agency which provides a service for looked after children, referred to the agency from local authorities, with foster carers who are recruited, trained, assessed, reviewed and supervised by the agency. The office is close to the centre of Stockport and is appropriate for its purpose.

### **Summary**

This inspection took place over one week. Four foster carers were seen in their home and a total of four young people. The inspector met with the manager, deputy manager, supervising social workers, support worker and attended a staff meeting and a team meeting. As no panel was held during August the panel papers for July's panel were inspected as were the last three panel minutes. Records of the agency were made available. Surveys were received from five foster carers and three young people and an email from a panel member .

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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

A high standard of support to foster carers has been further supplemented by the work of four support workers and an increase in foster carers who provide respite care. The manager's monitoring of the service has been refined to increase its effectiveness. The roles and responsibilities of individual staff have been developed and are now clearer. The agency has been more active in pursuing information from placing social workers, and foster carers are more involved in requesting written information. The manager has gained a qualification in management.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service can demonstrate that the health and development of children in foster care is promoted. Information is requested at the referral and matching stages, but is not always made available by the placing authorities. The agency has improved its monitoring of the quality and amount of health information provided by placing social workers. A new format for foster carer reports to statutory reviews allows them to record missing information. Supervising social workers and foster carers continue to request full information, both in writing and verbally when social workers visit and at planning and review meetings. In addition, they have used other resources, such as school nurses to find out about immunisations. Supervising social workers have visited local authorities to read files. The number of children who have had annual health assessments has risen. Children and young people are receiving specialist health care as necessary. Regular planning meetings monitor that their needs are being met. Children are registered with general practitioners, opticians and dentists. Foster carers record all appointments and administration of medication. Supervising social workers see the records on their visits. All reports of illnesses and accidents are monitored by the manager. Comments from placing social workers on children's files are positive about their health needs being met. Foster carers are clear about their role and responsibilities in regard to health promotion. Young people know about healthy living and are enjoying balanced and varied diets. A range of training on health and development is provided to foster carers. Expert advice from a specialist in child health

(who is also a member of the panel) is available and she has been involved in the agency's medication policy.

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

The provision is good.

The agency can demonstrate that it continues to safeguard children in foster care through its policies, procedures and practices. The responsible individual and the Registered Manager are suitably experienced and qualified to run a fostering agency. The manager is registered and has both a social work qualification and a management qualification. The majority of the staff have been with the agency for several years, and the staff team is experienced and skilled in supporting carers to meet the needs of young people. The recruitment, selection and supervision of foster carers ensures that they provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Health and safety assessments take place prior to approval and are updated regularly. Supervising social workers check that cars used to transport children are safe and that appropriate insurance is in place. Risk assessments of dogs in fostering households are carried out and the agency has access to specialist advice. Records show that unannounced visits are carried out annually, and these are undertaken by the team manager as part of her quality assurance role. The agency has procedures in place on matching children with foster carers and can demonstrate that they are carried out in practice. They have consistently had low levels of placements ending in an unplanned manner. The staff work to ensure that they have all the available information in order to make informed decisions in conjunction with foster carers and placing social workers. Referral forms sampled mainly contained good quality information outlining the children's needs in placement. Where possible meetings take place to discuss matching and to plan introductions. Despite repeated requests from the agency, placing social workers do not always provide full and accurate information. Written foster placement agreements contain matching considerations and identify areas where foster carers need additional support. Where children share bedrooms, this is included in foster placement agreements. Good practice in introducing children to new carers was evident. Protection of children in foster care is a priority of this agency. Training and advice to foster carers addresses safeguarding issues, including caring for children who have been abused, internet safety and behaviour management. It can demonstrate that its procedures and practices continue to ensure that children are safe in foster placements. Each foster home has its own safe caring policy which is monitored by supervising social workers and updated as necessary. It is evident from foster carers that they are practising safe care in their homes. The agency has consistently responded appropriately to any complaints or allegations and has completed the required notifications. Foster carers are aware of the procedures in the event of children being missing from home. Foster carers have clear guidelines on acceptable and prohibited forms of behaviour management and their practice is monitored by the agency. From files and meetings with foster carers it is clear that they use encouragement and praise in addition to reasonable sanctions where necessary. Training for foster carers in positive behaviour management, includes safe holding, is provided and was said to have been useful. The agency's policy makes it clear that any incidents of physical intervention must be reported to the agency and the placing social worker. The agency has well established recruitment and selection procedures for staff. The majority of the necessary information is on files, including personal references and checks which are carried out prior to applicants starting work. Not all files demonstrate that gaps in employment have been explained. The agency renews Criminal Records Bureau certificates for staff every three years. All social work staff have appropriate qualifications, experience and are registered with the General Social Care Council. As there was no panel meeting in August, panel papers for July were inspected and

minutes from the last three meetings. The fostering panel is suitably constituted, with members who have experience and expertise in foster care, child care, education and health, and have written policies and procedures which are followed in practice. Panel training has taken place recently and has considered the role of panel in assessing prospective families in line with Every Child Matters outcomes, safeguarding boards and ensuring that foster carers are able to meet the outcomes for children. The agency has access to health advice from a panel member and discussions in panel have included parenting courses for foster carers and smoking. The panel is looking at what can be learned from placements which end in an unplanned way. It is evident that the panel exercises scrutiny and has an effective quality assurance role.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency values diversity and achieves positive educational outcomes for children and young people. Equality and diversity permeates training and foster carers and the agency work to meet children's needs in relation to gender, religion, ethnic origin, language and culture. Where trans-racial placements have been made additional support is available to foster carers, and the agency can demonstrate that needs are being met. Specific training has been made available to foster carers looking after children with disabilities. Foster Care Services has a long established contract with the National Teaching and Advisory Service (NT&AS), a specialist agency, to give priority to educational issues and to enhance the support to young people, foster carers and staff. Attendance and attainment is monitored. It is evident from discussions with staff, foster carers, young people and from records that this partnership leads to improved outcomes for young people in education. Packages of support from NT&AS are flexible and based on individual needs. Foster carers are involved in schools, attend parents evenings and events and encourage young people to achieve. Children and young people said they enjoy school and have gained certificates for attendance and achievements.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency can demonstrate that foster carers promote contact arrangements for children and young people. Foster placement agreements set out contact arrangements and the foster carer's role in setting up dates and venues and transport arrangements. When necessary the agency calls planning meetings to discuss arrangements and listens to young people's opinions. Foster carers are committed to supporting children to keep in contact with significant people and receive training which informs them of children's rights and the value of contact. Carers keep full records of contact arrangements which are fed back to placing social workers. A confidential feedback service has been provided by the agency for children and young people which they can complete on computer. Examples were given which demonstrates that the agency listens to young people and acts in accordance with their wishes. Young people attend planning meetings and reviews and are encouraged and supported to voice their opinions. The agency takes heed of those young people, mainly those in long term foster care, who find questionnaires intrusive. In day to day life foster carers give children and young people appropriate choices and children stated that they are listened to. A complaints booklet for children includes telephone numbers of national agencies and a complaints form. Foster carers are asked to give their views about the service they receive from the agency in a variety of ways, including written contributions to their reviews, feedback following training sessions and in supervision or support groups. Foster carers said they felt that their opinions are valued.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people in foster care are prepared for adulthood. The agency have produced guidance booklets for foster carers and young people which lead to improved planning of preparation for independence. Examples were given where young people have been supported and encouraged to develop skills which have allowed them to move on to independent living. Foster carers are well informed about local services and assist young people to find appropriate housing, access leisure interests and find out about continuing education and work. The agency continues to request pathway plans from local authorities actively and persistently, with varying degrees of success. They acknowledge the need for further training for staff and foster carers in the light of planned changes in the law.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose has been revised earlier this year to reflect the facilities and services provided. The agency has a record of being well managed and well organised. All of the management team have considerable experience in fostering, appropriate qualifications and the requisite skills to manage the work of the agency effectively and efficiently. The majority of the staff have been with the agency for considerable lengths of time and roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are clear. Communication within the agency is effective and weekly staff meetings which include administrative staff and the agency manager, and social work team meetings ensure that information is disseminated. These take place on a Monday morning so that feedback from the social workers who have been on duty support over the weekend is given speedily. The agency has appropriate administrative and financial management staff who have been with the agency for a long time, and who provide effective support to the managers and social work staff. Staff that are supervised regularly, said they are well supported and have annual appraisals. They expressed satisfaction with the training provided. Not all of the support workers have completed safeguarding training. The agency has a recruitment strategy for foster carers which is informed by the range of referrals of children from local authorities, and uses a variety of media including their own website. One person takes initial enquiries and does the majority of initial visits in order to provide a consistent approach. There is an emphasis on giving enquirers information, and it is suggested to them that they read inspection reports and look at local authorities and other agencies before making an informed decision. All applicants receive induction training prior to their home assessment starting. Foster carers commented that the assessment process had been carried out thoroughly and sensitively. The reports are comprehensive and include social workers assessments backed up by evidence. Foster carers are expected to continue training after approval and there is a range of subjects covered. Foster carers commented positively about the value of the training. Foster carers have consistently been glowing in their comments about support from the agency. High levels of support are available to them in a variety of ways. Supervising social workers visit and telephone foster carers regularly. Support is increased during more demanding times. Foster carers have access to support both within and outside of normal office hours and said that if they leave messages the supervising social workers always ring them back. Support groups are held in different locations. A small group of support workers provide practical support to foster carers either in a planned way, or in reaction to a crisis. This service is managed and the support workers supervised by the project manager, and is flexible and responsive to need. The roles and responsibilities of the support workers in complementing the work of the supervising social

workers is clear. The agency also has a small number of carers who provide respite placements to other foster carers. Where it is more appropriate to do so, family or friends of foster carers are approved as respite carers for specific children. Children's records are well organised and are kept up to date. The agency has had a new computer system installed which led to technology problems that are being addressed. There is sufficient space to store records safely and confidentially. The agency can demonstrate that it is financially viable and has effective arrangements for the control and supervision of its financial affairs.

## **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 request full information from placing social workers (NMS 8)
- continue to make improvements in preparing young people for adulthood and leaving care (NMS 14)
- ensure that all staff receive safeguarding training (NMS 19)
- demonstrate that all required information is gained when employing staff (NMS 15).



## 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.**