

The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036488
Inspection date	13 August 2007
Inspector	Sophie Wood
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Xcel 2000 8 London Road SITTINGBOURNE Kent ME10 1NA
Telephone number	01795 470222
Email	eric.worton@excel2000.com
Registered person	The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd
Registered manager	Diane Gay
Responsible individual	Eric Joseph Worton
Date of last inspection	18 July 2006

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd is based in Sittingbourne in Kent and is developing its services in Essex and South East London. The agency has 46 approved fostering households currently providing placements for 49 children and young people. Local authorities from the home counties and London boroughs purchase placements for emergency, bridging, short term, long term and permanency. Such placements provide for single occupancy, sibling groups, asylum seekers, disabilities and mothers and babies. The team comprises three Directors, a Chief Executive, Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, four qualified social workers, a children's services team, a management personal assistant, two administration supervisors, an administration assistant, a finance officer and a maintenance worker. The agency is able to access child centred therapy from qualified therapists, if this is requested and also provides structured day care facilities for children who are not attending school.

Summary

This key inspection was conducted over four days, with an additional visit made to observe the panel. Interviews were held with the Chief Executive, Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, social work staff, the children's services team and the administrative team. Those foster carers, randomly selected were visited in their own homes and a case tracking exercise was undertaken in respect of those placed with them. Policies, procedures and other pertinent documentation was scrutinised and the returned pre inspection material, including surveys from foster carers, young people and placing authorities was also used to inform this report. The agency demonstrates good outcomes in terms of promoting health, welfare and education. Sound business management systems ensure continued development, growth and financial viability. The team is qualified, experienced and cohesive. It provides good support to foster carers. Shortfalls include the monitoring of health and safety issues within fostering households and, in some cases, the young person's guide to the service is insufficient.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The newly appointed Chief Executive brings a wealth of previous business management experience and is particularly focusing upon marketing and development. Foster carers and young peoples files have been reviewed and updated. They are easier to audit and hold clear, relevant information. Additional forms pertaining to accidents and injuries are now being used and a detailed front sheet has been added to the health section of each the young person's file. The smoking policy has been revised and updated to include greater detail upon the impact of passive smoking. There is improved liaison with the local police and foster carers have received training in respect of children going missing. A children's services team has been established, with a view to ensuring the views of all of the placed and birth children of the agency are heard and responded to. A core panel has been established to undertake specific tasks, which are then presented to the full panel meetings. Premises have been secured in the London area in order to take the agency closer to its fostering households there.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The primary health needs of children and young people are being soundly met. All children and young people are registered with local health services and routine appointments are occurring; this includes appointments with specialist health services, where this is needed. There is also good liaison occurring with local 'Looked After Children' (LAC) Nurses. Foster carers keep and maintain written records about health appointments, illnesses, accidents and any medication being administered. They also produce monthly reports, which include information on health. These records are checked at each supervision visit by the carer's supervising social worker. Regular, ongoing training includes health related topics, recently including drug and alcohol awareness, sexual health and first aid. Relevant training is also provided for social workers of the agency, for example, a two day course on 'Healthy Matters' was recently attended by one of the supervising social workers. All care files hold a separate section pertaining to health and the foster carer agreement clearly outlines the foster carer's responsibility to support and promote the health needs of those in their care. Those foster carers who were interviewed spoke knowledgeably about this aspect of their role, giving clear examples of the guidance and support they are providing, such as ensuring regular physical activity, providing healthy meals and supporting health care appointments where this is needed.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She regularly attends local and national fostering forums to maintain her knowledge of fostering issues and developments. Social work team members come from a range of relevant professional social work backgrounds and this includes the directors, who were also previously foster carers. The Responsible Individual has a sound understanding of his role and responsibilities and works closely with the Registered Manager. The children's services team is expanding and is staffed by individuals who possess the skills to deliver the services it describes. The administrative team demonstrate competence and are acutely aware of how elements of their role supports the practitioners and fits within the relevant fostering standards. This is a cohesive team, which respects each others' roles and is currently welcoming the newly appointed Chief Executive, who has a background in business management and marketing. Form F assessments are being conducted by suitably qualified members of the team. There are occasions whereby independent social workers are commissioned to complete these also. Those assessments chosen for inspection show that all of the key elements have been comprehensively covered and foster carers who were interviewed confirm this has been a thorough and detailed process. With a number of different individuals completing this work, there are differences in terms of style and content. One example was found of a reference being undertaken for a prospective carer, which gave no substantive information in terms of the fostering task. At present, although the Registered Manager sees most of the assessments, there is no clear role for her to gate - keep or quality assure each one. Clear, sound written guidance is in place for all foster carers with regards health and safety issues. All foster carers are being supported to write and implement their own 'safe care' policies. Some good examples of these were seen, however, there was an example of a young person moving into a home with other young people in placement and this piece of work is incomplete. Detailed health and safety checks are conducted as part of the initial assessment of prospective foster carers. Shortfalls are identified and where necessary, requirements are made by the agency to rectify these as part of the approval process. An example was found whereby such requirements have been made, however, the shortfalls remain, even though the household is now approved, with young people in residence. Matching processes are detailed and clear. The pro forma in place requires specific detail and looks to consider the presenting needs of the referred young

person against the skills, experience and training / support needs of the carer(s) identified as a potential match. The quality of these forms is variable as some have not been fully completed. This is an area that is not overseen by the Registered Manager. Foster carers receive clear guidance on child protection, countering bullying and behaviour management. This is introduced at the assessment stage and beyond. There are systems in place within the agency to ensure the Registered Manager and Responsible Individual maintain a close monitoring eye on such issues. The administrative team demonstrate a sound awareness as to how child protection concerns may affect them and they manage confidential information appropriately. However, they do not receive child protection awareness training as part of their induction or ongoing training. A complaints procedure is in place for all stakeholders. The complaints log is held securely and holds clear records, which demonstrate the prescribed process is being followed. The complaints document for children and young people is written in one single format. It does not reflect the age and ability range of all of those currently placed by the agency. The recruitment process is robust and withstands close scrutiny. All appropriate checks are completed and individuals can only take up their post upon all checks being received. Staff of the agency are qualified and competent; they receive ongoing relevant training and provide foster carers with the support, supervision and guidance they need. The fostering panel implements sound and robust procedures. The meetings are focused and professionally led by the Chair person, the Responsible Individual for the agency. A number of members are approaching the end of their term and this is already being effectively planned for. Members come from a range of relevant backgrounds and there is a good mix of agency staff and independent members. More recently, the agency also established its own 'core panel', consisting of the Chair person and one other member. Areas of the agency's business that are not required to be presented to a full panel for deliberation are discussed here and subsequently presented at the next full panel meeting. Panel members receive paperwork in good time and the minutes of the meetings are detailed and clear. The Registered Manager acts as panel advisor and has no casting vote.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Core subjects including equality and diversity are being covered at the start of the assessment stage and beyond through ongoing training. Clear written policies and procedures underpin these values. The ongoing staffing and foster carer recruitment campaign shows the agency's desire to reflect ethnic and cultural diversity throughout the organisation and such factors clearly feature throughout the matching process. Foster carers receive training and ongoing guidance with regards discrimination. One fostering household gave clear and explicit examples of the support they provide for a young person with disabilities. An acute awareness of the presenting issues for this young person was demonstrated. The agency offers its service to asylum seeking young people, for whom English is not their first language. Although the services of an Interpreter are provided for the initial placement planning meeting, the young person's guide is not translated into any other language. Educational attendance and achievement is being actively promoted and supported by the agency. Foster carers are fully aware of their own responsibilities and they implement these in practice. Ongoing monitoring shows good overall attendance and the agency provides appropriate supervised activities for any young person who may not be currently attending school or college. All care files hold a separate education section which contains copies of school reports, educational statements, where appropriate, and personal education plans. Foster carers and the children's services manager routinely attend all school appointments and reviews. The agency provides a grant for any new child joining the agency, in order for school uniform to be purchased without delay. Foster

carers provide young people with the space and materials they need in order to complete homework.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Care files hold clear and specific details with regards individual contact arrangements. Foster carers receive appropriate training and guidance on this subject. They promote and support positive contact through a variety of ways, including letterbox, telephone calls and visits. One carer described how she has to set aside her own negative feelings about a contact arrangement in the best interests of the young person in her care and is able to do this because of the support she receives from her supervising social worker. The agency further promotes contact by providing resource workers and drivers to facilitate visits being conducted out of the local area. The children's services manager identifies consultation processes with fostered and birth children as needing to improve. To this end, systems are being developed, now that the team has been formed, to ensure all of the young people of the agency receive the same opportunities for consultation. Currently, all young people, including birth children are canvassed for their opinions during the foster carer annual review process and records of foster carer supervision show they are spoken with if present in the home during a supervision visit. The agency continues to facilitate trips and outings during the school holidays and the majority of surveys received from young people indicate they do feel listened to by the agency. The agency seeks to obtain ongoing feedback from the foster carers through the annual review process, supervision visits and meetings with the directors.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose is clear and concise. It contains all of the necessary information and is subject to ongoing review and amendment. Whilst the young person's guide contains the relevant details, its current single format does not reflect the different ages, abilities and linguistic needs of all of the young people in placement. Clear and effective monitoring systems are being implemented. The agency has a clear vision for its immediate and longer term future. Its chief objective is to secure continued future financial viability by expanding and developing its services and geographical location. A recent internal audit identified areas requiring improvement. A number of staff are asking for improvements to be made with regards communication systems and positive steps are currently being taken to meet this request. The management structure of the agency is being reviewed, given recent expansion and the plans to continue to grow and develop. The Registered Manager delegates appropriately when this is necessary, although this process is not prescribed in any written format. The newly established children's services team has its own line manager, who is subsequently accountable to one of the Directors. This creates a potential gap in terms of information exchange with the Registered Manager and she has no direct management responsibility for this group. It is this team which takes initial referrals and this process is not being overseen by the Registered Manager either. A significant amount of her time is currently being spent developing the agency in other geographical areas. Consideration is currently being given towards examining the need to create

an additional management position to support her and staff team with this development in mind. Workloads for supervising social workers are manageable. They are able to conduct regular carer supervision visits and to meet their own work targets. They receive terms and conditions which are comparable with other providers and this includes funding and time allocation for professional development. Every employee has a written contract and job description; one has not been updated to reflect recent changes for the individual. Supervision meetings are occurring regularly for all staff. These address performance, training needs and are directly linked to the appraisal process. Some appraisal records indicate the same development and training needs as being ongoing over two or three years. The training programme for foster carers is broad and comprehensive. Although foster carers from the newer offices, London and Essex, have not received as much as those within the Kent region, this is being addressed. Attendance is monitored and carers frequently report through their surveys that the topics offered meet their needs. The strategy for working with foster carers is clear and effective. Supervision visits occur regularly. A structured written format is used and carers receive copies of the written notes. Written foster carer agreements contain all of the necessary information. The responsibilities of the foster carers and the agency are clearly outlined. The handbook for foster carers is comprehensive and it is updated regularly. Unannounced visits are occurring and the agency provides 24 hour on call emergency cover; those carers interviewed praised this provision. Agency supervising social workers are explicitly clear about their own role and how this fits with the responsibilities of the young person's own social worker; placing authority social workers report positively about the communication received from foster carers and the agency staff. Care files for young people are held securely. They are well - ordered, indexed and easy to follow. The information needed from the placing authority is in place; this includes the placement agreement, care plan and medical consent. Separate sections are in place for health and education; this allows these areas to be easily tracked and monitored. All other administrative records are in good order. They are appropriately stored and where necessary, access is restricted. A clear policy and procedure describes the process of 'access to records'. A new electronic data base is being developed; this is reducing the need for paper records. Separate records are held in respect of complaints, child protection concerns and notifications. These are scrutinised regularly as part of the agency's own monitoring process. Staff personnel files are well ordered, indexed and clear; however, one of the files sampled did not contain a photograph of the staff member as required. The premises are spacious, well maintained and within walking distance of the town centre, which has bus routes and a train station. All of the staff of the Kent office have sufficient working space and the equipment they need. There are separate rooms for training and meetings and adequate facilities for confidential storage. A new office has recently been secured for the planned expansion of the London region. Decoration and the installation of equipment is near completion. There is provision for social work and administrative staff to be based here and there is a large room to be used for training and meetings.

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
----------	--------	----------

6	ensure the health and safety checklist is rigorously implemented, with evidence detailed for presentation to the panel at the foster carer annual review meeting. (Regulation 29(4)(a).	31 October 2007
15	ensure all personnel files hold a recent photograph of the staff member. (Regulation 20, Schedule 1).	31 October 2007

Recommendations

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

- ensure that written information which would normally be shared with children, for example consultation forms and safe care statements, is presented in a language which can be understood by all children with who it is shared
- maintain records that demonstrate how it is ensured that children are aware of their rights as set out in the children's guide
- continue to expand upon the training, guidance and advice being given to foster carers with regards health promotion topics. (NMS 12).
- review the current assessment checklists and develop ways to ensure issues identified are passed on to the supervising social worker for continued monitoring. Consider the value of a gate keeping role for the panel. Consider the value of the Registered Manager having a quality assurance role in terms of all of the assessments being conducted. (NMS 6).
- ensure the 'safe care' policies of all foster carers are monitored and updated, particularly in the planning stages of introducing a new placement. (NMS 9).
- provide updated guidance for each team member dealing with initial referrals, to ensure a consistent approach is given to the completion of 'matching' documentation. Consider the value of giving the Registered Manager a quality assurance role in terms of monitoring each matching form completed. (NMS 8).
- consider the value of providing basic child protection awareness training for the administrative team. (NMS 19)
- consider the value of re - instigating the Communication group, given the current transition and growth of the company. (NMS 20).
- review the contents of the most recent appraisal meetings and take appropriate steps to rectify shortfalls in training / development provision. (NMS 20).
- ensure the deputising arrangements are formally captured in writing and consider the benefits of the Registered Manager having line management responsibility for the children's services team. (NMS 16).
- review and amend the complaints details for children and young people. Consider the use of pictures and symbols and consider the value of consulting with those children and young people in placement for feedback on the current format. (NMS 9).
- ensure the contract of employment for one specific staff member is updated. (NMS 25)

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.