

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Inspector | Sharon Lloyd |
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| Date of last inspection | 5 December 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

SWIIS Foster Care Limited is a national independent provider of foster care services. This inspection report relates to a branch of the agency based in Manchester. SWIIS provides a range of short term, long term and respite foster placements to children in local authorities in the north west. There are currently 52 approved fostering households offering 134 places to children aged from birth to 18. At the time of inspection, approximately 70 children were being looked after in SWIIS households.

Summary

The inspection focused on all key standards. The service is effectively managed and organised and children live in households where they are well looked after by foster carers who are committed to their wellbeing and development.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The service continually reviews its policies and procedures and updates them to provide improved services to children. For example, the system for monitoring, recording and following up restraints is now more robust and serves to protect children and carers better. A new system has been introduced that ensures that up to date health information is always available for each child's statutory review so that decisions and planning are based on accurate and full information. The training programme has been extended to provide carers with a greater insight into the needs of children with disabilities and children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. A male education case worker has been employed and provides children with a good male role model. Of the three recommendations made in the last report of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, one has been met and one has been withdrawn by Ofsted. The recommendation to seek more suitable premises has been acted upon but no viable alternative has yet been found. The service intend to make this a priority in the forthcoming year.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's health is prioritised and the health advisor works closely with foster carers, link workers, children and other health professionals. This ensures that children's identified health needs are met quickly and effectively. The health advisor attends initial planning meetings, identifies any gaps in health history and actively and quickly seeks and obtains missing information. Foster carers are trained in first aid and any health matters relating to the particular needs of the children they care for. They keep medicine administration records and these are forwarded to the health advisor and manager so that children's health can be effectively monitored and any needs addressed. Supervising social workers routinely monitor and advise on the health of each child. Children know about their health needs and are involved in decisions about treatment. Healthy eating and exercise is promoted and several children's health and development have improved substantially since placement with their carers.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Many good systems and practices are in place to keep children safe. Rigorous assessments of carers are undertaken and any shortfalls in information are explored in depth by the experienced and competent panel. An independent reviewing officer chairs foster carer reviews and review reports are scrutinised by the panel before a decision is made to continue with carers' approvals. The panel provides feedback to the service on the quality of its work. Reviews focus on how well the carers are meeting children's needs and identify any areas of training that would improve the quality of care provided to children. This process ensures children receive a high standard of care. Foster carer's homes are routinely checked to ensure children live in a safe environment. Pet risk assessments are carried out and reviewed as necessary. Children are matched to carers carefully and over 70% of children move on successfully to long term or adoptive placements or home to their birth families. Most of the others are placed with SWIIS for short term task centred work and move to local authority (LA) foster carers. Matching reports to evidence the good decision making that takes place are not routinely completed. Safe caring policies are reviewed with the placement of each new child and risk assessments are used to promote the safety of the child and every one else in the foster family. Carers and staff are trained in child protection procedures and know what to do in the event of an allegation or disclosure. Children know who to approach with a complaint. Twenty per cent of the children cared for within the agency took part in the inspection and all said they have no complaints, are well looked after and know who to go to with a problem. Children receive support with anger management which they find helpful. Allegations against carers are thoroughly investigated and referred to the Local Safeguarding team where necessary. Children's safety is paramount following an allegation and alternative placements are found where necessary to protect them during the course of an investigation. Recruitment and selection procedures are not sufficiently robust to ensure that all staff employed by the agency or contracted to work with children are suitable. The systems for ensuring that Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are renewed on adult members of a fostering household are unsatisfactory. Children's right to privacy and confidentiality is respected and foster carers are aware of the need to keep sensitive information confidential. Personal information about a child is not shared with others in placement and is only made available on a need to know basis with the consent of the child's placing authority.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children's diverse needs are identified and met by carers who are trained and supported to meet them. Where children are placed in transracial placements, their ethnic, cultural and religious needs are considered and addressed. SWIIS actively seeks to recruit carers from widely diverse backgrounds. Children make good educational progress. Many children have improved their school attendance, behaviour, attitude and academic performance since being with SWIIS carers. Foster carers know the value of a good education. They support children with homework, maintaining close working relationships with schools so that any problems experienced by children are quickly identified and addressed. SWIIS insist that foster carers do not take children on holiday during term time and that education is not missed unnecessarily. All carers know this policy. Foster carers, schools and children appreciate the support they receive from the education case officers and support workers. One young person spontaneously wrote a letter of thanks to an education case worker saying, 'your lessons were really helpful for my GCSEs which I think I did really well in thanks to you'. School placements are sustained and exclusions prevented by effective intervention and good liaison with LA education departments and schools. Where children are excluded, they are taught by qualified and experienced SWIIS

teachers until alternative education packages can be provided. All children have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and a SWIIS educational plan focusing on particular areas where the child needs help. This help is provided.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children maintain contact with their birth families and plans for contact are set out in placement agreements. Their wishes are taken into account in contact arrangements. Four siblings are placed together and respite for all four is provided by another foster family to support the placement. Children are familiar with the SWIIS staff and know who to go to with a complaint or a problem. They say they are listened to and their views are taken seriously. They contribute to their own and to foster carer reviews and comment on day to day matters that affect them. Supervising social workers meet regularly with children and provide them with an opportunity to comment upon the placement and their progress. A support group for young people over the age of 13 meets every three months and provides them with the opportunity to discuss matters affecting their lives and to plan for future independent living. The groups are not always well attended. This group of young people have contributed to the redesign of the Children's Guide. Plans are in place to introduce young people to a representative from 'A National Voice' to show them how they can influence and improve their own lives and those of other children in care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people approaching independence receive a high level of support in planning for their futures. This ranges from information about sexual health to guidance in the completion of job and college application forms. Those who wish to remain with their carers after leaving school and until they are 18 are provided with the details of an independent advocate who negotiates with the placing authority on their behalf. As a result of this some young people remain with their carers until they are ready to leave. Where it is in the child's best interest SWIIS support carers to adopt children or to provide supported lodgings for young people who wish to remain with them after they are 18. This sometimes means the loss of well trained, experienced carers, but the service considers the needs of each individual child first and foremost. Children have sufficient clothing and receive pocket money regularly. They have toys, games and personal possessions. They live in comfortable, well maintained homes and are encouraged to save and to take care of their possessions. They are taken on holidays and have the opportunity to participate in out of school activities according to their interests and wishes. Sufficient funding is made available to foster carers to achieve this. Foster carers receive clear information about allowances and expenses that is updated annually.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Effective management and organisation is a strength of this service and results in children receiving good quality care from a well trained and supported work force. A competent and experienced manager leads the service, with the assistance of qualified and experienced senior staff. The responsible individual takes an active role in the management of senior staff and oversees the work of the education and health staff. Workloads are monitored and staff are well trained, supervised and supported. Effective multi-disciplinary team working ensures

children's needs are identified and addressed. All staff are appropriately qualified for the work they undertake. Staff retention is good and staff appreciate the level of supervision and support provided. Assessments of potential carers are adequate and often of a high standard. The quality is monitored by the manager with input from the panel. Pre-approval and core training ensures that foster carers have a good understanding of their role and the needs of looked after children. Children benefit from living with foster carers who are well supported and who receive frequent, effective supervision from competent, knowledgeable social workers and other staff. At least one member of the fostering household attends a minimum of four training events per year as well as any specific training aimed at meeting the needs of children in placement. This does not meet the National Minimum Standard for both approved carers to attend training. Records are well maintained, comprehensive and stored securely. Foster carers keep records of significant life events and maintain a daily diary that is regularly reviewed by supervising social workers. Not all carers and children are clear about what information can be shared with children and how much children can contribute to their own records. The Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the service provided and is made available to all foster carers. Although SWIIS policy is to provide the Children's Guide to all children, some said they have not seen it. This guide has recently been updated and is now available in two forms, for both younger and older children.

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 |
|----------|---|------------------|
| 15 | ensure that comprehensive suitability checks are carried out on all staff prior to employment and on contracted workers who have regular contact with children placed by the agency (Regulation 20 (1,2 and 3)) | 31 December 2007 |
| 6 | improve systems to ensure that an up to date CRB disclosure is held on all adult members of a fostering household (Regulation 27 (2)(a)). | 31 January 2008 |

Recommendations

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

- consider using matching reports as an addendum to placement agreements to show how children are matched with particular carers (NMS 8.4)
- ensure that foster carers know what information can be shared with children and encourage children to contribute to their records (NMS 24.7)
- provide training at a selection of times that are convenient for carers so that where two adults in a fostering household are approved as joint carers, they can both attend all training (NMS 23.4)

- increase the frequency of children's support groups and remind children and foster carers of their value in helping children to make a positive contribution to their own and others' lives (NMS 11.1)
- continue to seek alternative accommodation that will meet all the requirements of the service (NMS 26.1).

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.