

Attachments Fostering Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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

Attachments Fostering Ltd is an independent fostering agency, based in Snodland, Kent. The staff team comprises a Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, two qualified social workers and three administrative personnel. A regular bank of qualified independent social workers is used for additional work and the agency has its own established fostering panel, chaired by an independent person. The agency currently has 12 approved fostering households, situated across the Kent region and there are eight children and young people in placement. Services offered include emergency, short term and bridging placements, long term, parent - child and sibling placements and respite provision. Within this, the agency also offers assistance with contact, therapeutic interventions, support with education and life story work.

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted over five days by one inspector. All of the key standards were inspected. The requirements made from the previous inspection were examined; these have been satisfactorily addressed. Overall, good outcomes were found, with a small number of actions and recommendations being made.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

From the previous inspection, a total of seven requirements were made. The agency has satisfactorily addressed these areas. Quarterly monitoring reports are being completed to a good standard and the agency's own case recording policy has been suitably updated. Health care sections within care files now hold clear and detailed relevant information. Safe care policies are in place for all fostering households and there is stringent monitoring of complaints and incidents. An additional qualified social worker has been recruited and a new independent chairperson has been appointed for the panel. All annual reviews of foster carers are now up to date.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people positively benefit from having their health needs assessed and met. Every child in placement is registered with local health care services and all health care appointments are being appropriately recorded. Care files hold a separate health care section and this contains details of immunisations, medical histories and consent for treatment. All of the children and young people have a written health record, which details all matters relating to their own medical and health needs. This record is the property of the young person and remains with them should they move placements. Where appropriate, referrals are made to external medical professionals, such as counselling or psychiatric services. Foster carers maintain weekly and monthly records, which are forwarded to the placing authority and are further shared at statutory review meetings. In the case of individual and specific medical conditions, appropriate links are being maintained with specialist nursing services, such as those specialising in Diabetes and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). The agency provides ongoing training on health promotion topics including promoting health, drug awareness and substance misuse.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The persons operating the service have the skills to do so. Staff of the agency are suitably qualified and foster carers are recruited subject to robust assessment processes. Appropriate checks and vetting procedures are conducted and refreshed within the prescribed timescales. Fostering households provide variable standards in terms of the health and safety aspects of the physical environment. Systems are in place to monitor placements and supervise foster carers. This includes an annual review process. Whilst children and young people are placed with foster carers subject to clear matching processes, some written records do not contain sufficient details with regards the skill deficits and training needs of foster carers, including how these will be addressed. All foster carers have written, and are implementing, their own safe care policies. They understand the agency's own child protection procedures. Allegations, concerns and incidents are swiftly reported and followed up by the agency. Written policy guidance on behaviour management is clear and appropriate. Children and young people know how to complain, both within and outside of the agency. A new panel chair person has been appointed. Panel members consider new approvals and the annual reviews of existing foster carers. The latter are presented by independent social workers. The panel may also be used to consider and give advice on other care and practice issues as these may arise. All members are subject to the same robust recruitment practice as is used for any other employee and come from a broad range of child care backgrounds.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency values diversity among its staff, foster carers and young people. Its ongoing recruitment campaign is targeting minority groups, which are currently under represented. Clear policies and procedures are in place with regards equal opportunities and valuing diversity. Ongoing training is provided on these topics. Children and young people are encouraged and supported to follow hobbies and interests of their own choosing; their achievements in all such areas are celebrated by their foster carers and the agency. Attendance and attainment at school is being closely monitored. Foster carers attend all educational review meetings, as well as other school events. Where necessary, agency representatives also attend should additional support be needed. Foster carers maintain clear records of school attendance and achievement. This information is passed on to placing authorities on a monthly basis and discussed further at statutory review meetings. Foster carers provide support with homework and ensure school uniforms and other necessary equipment is provided. Where necessary, the agency provides additional classroom support, and for children not in school, relevant and appropriate activities are made available.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency actively promotes positive family contact. This is made explicitly clear at initial foster carer recruitment training and beyond. The agency is able to offer placing authorities assistance with travel, venues and supervision if this is needed. Foster carers engage positively with birth family members and maintain written records as required by the agency and placing authority. They receive appropriate support and guidance during difficult contact issues. A number of forums exist whereby foster carers and young people can share their views and

receive information from the agency. Returned questionnaires indicate that children and young people feel valued by their foster carers. They say they are effectively listened to. They also confirm they are regularly seen by the visiting supervising social worker. Whilst a number of foster carers report positively on consultation processes, others express dissatisfaction in this area.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The written information available for all stakeholders is informative and clear. The agency is sufficiently staffed to meet the needs of the service and clear plans are in place to review staffing levels as the agency grows. The two social workers are directly supervised and managed by the Registered Manager. Supervision records are detailed and clear; ongoing training and development needs are being recognised and provided for. Additional work, such as foster carer annual reviews, is effectively distributed to regular independent social workers. Such individuals also provide training sessions on topics they have expertise in. The agency's written policy guidance on the support and supervision of foster carers has been updated. Staff have received training on this and more is planned. The supervision format for foster carers has been reviewed and the content of those records seen is variable in terms of quality and detail. Emergency on call cover is provided for foster carers 24 hours a day and the agency funds membership with the Fostering Network. The training programme offers a broad range of courses and individual specific requests can be made. Feedback from foster carers rates the support they receive from inadequate to outstanding. The fostering task is made clear to all foster carers within the written 'Foster Carer Agreement', although one fostering household has not yet signed this document. Written case records and other administrative logs are securely held. Details are clear, informative and easily retrievable. The administrative team has the equipment and resources it needs and a new computer software package is currently being installed.

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 fostering households provide a safe physical environment for current and prospective placements (NMS 6, Regulation 11(a).	31 January 2008
21	ensure the quality and content of written supervision records for foster carers is consistently achieved (NMS 21, Regulation 30).	31 January 2008

21	ensure updated and signed Foster Carer Agreements are in place for all foster carers (NMS 21, Regulation 28, Schedule 5).	31 January 2008
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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 greater detail within matching documentation with regards to any skill deficits of foster carers and how these will be supported. (MNS 8).
- review current consultation mechanisms and processes for foster carers (NMS 11).
- continue to review and make subsequent provision for staffing levels that meet the needs of the service (NMS 17).

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.