

Blue Sky Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
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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

Blue Sky Fostering is an independent Fostering Agency based in Ringwood, Hampshire. It was established in 2005. Foster placements are provided for young people who have a range of needs including those with complex needs. The types of foster placements include long term placements, mother and baby placements and short - term breaks for children with disabilities. The agency provides foster placements to a number of local authorities including London Boroughs.

Summary

This key announced inspection took place over a period of two and a half days. This inspection included visits to foster households, an observation of the fostering panel and discussions with the staff team. There are very good examples of how the agency strives to ensure the best outcomes for young people and foster carers. Equally, effective management systems are in place to ensure that staff are fully supported to accomplish their duties successfully. There is substantial evidence which demonstrates how the agency is evolving to expand on current practice and business growth. There is a strong sense of inclusion which takes into account the views and opinions of foster carers and young people when reviewing practice and service delivery. Staff are empowered and motivated to work on initiative and performance management is very effective.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There are no actions outstanding. A risk assessment was required for each young person placed. Risk assessments are now in place for all young people in placement. These are revised and updated at every LAC review. Work shops are now being arranged to reinforce the importance of placement agreements with foster carers. The registered provider was required to develop quality monitoring systems to include the completion of foster placement agreements, any incidence of bullying, regularity of foster carer reviews and quality of records completed by foster carers. Monitoring systems are in place for monitoring high profile incidents such as bullying and record keeping. This is under review. For example the manager examines at least five case files at any one time for supervision purposes. The registered provider was required to develop foster carers training programme to include topics such as management of medication, anti bullying strategies and cultural diversity. The training programme has been updated to include these topics. There are no recommendations outstanding. It was recommended that the Registered Provider undertake a review of the matching process to address any shortfalls. A criteria is in place for all matching processes. The criteria is scored. Action is taken depending on the outcome of the overall score. It was recommended that verification of recruitment references is documented. Recruitment processes now include verification of references. Qualifications are also checked. It was recommended that training expectations are set out in the foster carer agreement. Training expectations have improved. This includes a new induction process being introduced in 2008 which will require foster carers to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) workbook. Administrative systems have developed since the previous inspection. An electronic database is now in place. This database is interactive and includes a 'paperless' file management system.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are robust procedures in place for ensuring that young people's health needs are met. This includes stringent monitoring processes, excellent record keeping and effective communication with external professionals and placing authorities. Foster carers are provided with a wide range of training opportunities on health topics. This includes learning opportunities on caring for children with specific health needs. Foster carers are committed to ensuring that young people have access to GP services and primary health care treatments.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency is lead by a team of professionals who are suitably qualified and experienced. Recruitment records are in very good order. Young people are placed with foster carers who provide safe and nurturing environments. Foster homes are clean, welcoming and furnished to a high standard. There are effective procedures in place for ensuring that these standards are maintained. This includes a vigorous health and safety monitoring system. Foster carers are highly valued by young people. Placing authorities are extremely satisfied with the overall quality of foster carers approved by the agency. Matching processes are thorough. A high level of professionalism is demonstrated through the management of referrals and placements. For example, statistics demonstrate that young people are only matched to foster carers who have the skills and experience to meet their needs. Placement Advisors are consistent in maintaining professional communication with foster carers, social workers and external bodies such as local authorities. Child protection and safe guarding procedures are comprehensive. These procedures are included in the foster carer handbook. Young people are given details of who they may contact if they are unhappy or being bullied. Communication with young people is strong. For example, supervising social workers have contact with young people at foster carers supervision meetings. Young people are also provided with cards and pre paid envelopes to complete if they have any concerns or if they wish to speak to someone. Young people are also consulted about their placement every three months. Prompt action is taken to address any suspicion of child protection or safeguarding matters. This includes effective communication with external professionals, risk management and excellent record keeping. Recruitment processes are vigorous. The staff team are highly experienced and qualified to carry out their designated roles. Robust procedures are in place for ensuring staff suitability. This includes interviews conducted in accordance with recruitment procedures, verification of references, and a comprehensive induction process. The management and conduct of the fostering panel is extremely efficient. This includes suitability checks, the thoroughness of the panel when making recommendations and expertise within the panel. Panel administration is very well organised and panel minutes are written to a very high standard. The functions of the panel are exceedingly good. For example, the quality assurance framework takes into account the efficiency and consistency of assessments and reviews.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Equality and diversity is promoted effectively throughout the agency. All staff are committed to ensuring that the policy on equality and diversity is delivered in accordance with young people's assessed needs and foster carers abilities to meet those needs. The agency is proactive

in developing current practice. For example, updated research has been carried out on caring for asylum seeking children. A guidance booklet on caring for asylum seeking children has been produced. Flexible training is provided to ensure that foster carers are familiar with specific needs of young people. This takes into account gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and linguistic backgrounds. Young people are fully supported by the agency and their foster carers for ensuring that their educational needs are met. Prompt action is taken to address educational shortfalls or lack of school placements. Young people are also provided with a booklet to record key facts about their education. Foster carers are committed to young people's education and learning. This includes identifying suitable school placements and attending school meetings and education reviews. Young people indicated in their surveys that the support they receive from their foster carers is excellent. Young people's educational attainments are acknowledged and celebrated. Educational achievement is maintained on individual files only. No central record is maintained to enable monitoring of the standards achieved by the fostering service. The procedures in place for the provision of short break services are consistent. These services are provided by foster carers who are suitably experienced and have attended relevant training.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The provisions for young people maintaining contact with families and significant others is a top priority for foster carers. Young people are very pleased with the support they receive from their foster carers for maintaining contact with their families. There are excellent support systems in place for ensuring that contact is a positive experience for a young person and their families. There are robust procedures in place for ensuring that outcomes of contact visits are communicated, recorded and monitored. The views of young people and significant others are highly valued by the fostering service. Processes for seeking these views and opinions are consistent and creative. For example, evaluation forms are distributed to foster carers, birth children and young people every three months. The outcomes of the evaluation forms contributes to service development and improvement. A newsletter is issued to all foster households on a monthly basis. Support groups for foster children or birth children are not facilitated by the fostering service. However, social groups are hosted at least twice a year which foster carers, their families and young people are invited to attend.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers are proactive in supporting young people preparing for semi or independent living. The agency promotes consultation with young people on transition planning and advocates for them with local authorities. Young people are encouraged to be self - motivating and responsible in a number of ways. This includes an active role in practical tasks such as cooking, budgeting and shopping independently. The procedures in place for challenging disruption or inconsistencies with external bodies are professional and persistent. The procedures in place for processing foster carer allowances are robust and well organised. These processes include effective record keeping and guaranteed methods of payment. There is a commitment to ensuring that fees and allowances reflect the quality of care. Information and on going advice on allowances is available to foster carers. The fostering service's commitment to young people and foster carers is exceptional. For example, discretionary awards are presented to young people for outstanding achievements. Discretionary gifts are presented to foster carers in acknowledgment of outstanding work and successful outcomes achieved with young people.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

An up to date Statement of Purpose is in place. This document is comprehensive and clearly specifies the aims and objectives of this service. Information is given to young people promptly at the start of their foster placement. This information is well written. It includes a full guide to being fostered and a summary of the complaints procedure and details for contacting external agencies. There are creative ways for introducing young people to their foster families before the start of their placement. For example, where possible, young people are presented with a family profile and images of the home. The management structure is effective and dynamic. There are very clear lines of accountability and all staff are extremely knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities. Strategies for developing the service are inspiring and extraordinary. Recent restructuring now consists of a 'Carer Development Support Team' and a 'Business Development Team'. The fostering service is very resourceful and investment in staff training and development is unquestionable. Human resources processes are effective and well managed. The staff team are professional and benefit considerably from the expertise and support from the senior management team. The ratio of supervising social workers to foster carers is remarkable. Workload management is effective ensuring good quality support and supervision of foster carers at all times. The overall recruitment and retention of foster carers is successful. There are stringent processes in place for monitoring foster carers skills and competence. This includes access to a very comprehensive training programme. The strategies for supporting foster carers are consistent and highly valued. These include a monthly support group, a reliable out - of - hours support service, a respite service and regular supervision. Foster carers indicated in their surveys that training and support are two outstanding aspects of the services provided. Procedures for carrying out foster carers annual reviews are thorough. This includes contributions from young people and members of the foster carers household. Reports for foster carers annual reviews are comprehensive. Young people's records and files are stored electronically and kept up to date. There are vigorous systems in place for monitoring the quality of young people's files. This includes a checklist of all documents required for all new placements and financial aid required. There is significant input in accordance with young people's age and ability to reflect and record significant life events. In support of this, all young people receive a memory box at the start of their placement. Some of the contents includes a camera, stationary and a photo album. Extensive training is provided for foster carers on life story work and recording significant events with young people. Administration records are stored electronically. There are effective procedures in place for ensuring that information kept away from the main office base is safeguarded. The quality and adequacy of records are monitored frequently. Business management and quality assurance systems are impressive. The outcomes of these systems provides a detailed overview on key topics such as training, placement stability, marketing strategies, advertisement, recruitment and staff development.

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):

- Implement a recording system of young people's educational attainments to enable the monitoring of standards of educational provision by the fostering service. (NMS 13)

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.