

Park Foster Care Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jeffrey Banham
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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

Park Foster Care is an independent fostering agency. It is constituted as a private limited company with a board of directors. The agency provides placements with approved foster carers for children looked after by local authorities. Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved to meet a range of short, medium and long-term foster placements. Services are delivered and managed from the agency's offices in Nantwich, South Cheshire. Park Foster Care is an approved provider of fostering services with the West Midlands Childcare Consortium and is also a member of the Fostering Network.

Summary

Park Foster Care provides highly effective placements for children looked after by local authorities. The agency has increased the number of foster carers approved to provide placements and the number of children in placements. Over the last year it has recruited more social work and administrative staff and moved to bigger premises. The agency places a high level of importance to reviewing and developing all areas of its policies, procedures and practices. All of the agency's managers, staff and carers work together to provide exceptional levels of child centred services to every child in placement. Foster carers are provided with exceptionally high levels of support.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Park Foster Care has introduced a number of significant changes to key areas of its services to improve the quality of care provided to children. It has improved its systems for managing variations in the approvals for foster carers. It has recruited an independent assessor who undertakes health and safety assessments of all foster carers' homes for initial approval and subsequent annual reviews. The agency has also recruited an independent reviewing officer who is responsible for the regular review of every foster carer. The fostering panel has improved its quality assurance function as a part of its standard practice. It provides the manager of the service with reports on the quality of foster carer assessment, approval and review and other areas of practice relevant to its function. The Children's Guide has been changed to provide children with more accessible information about their placement in foster care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that it provides carers who can help each child to receive effective support to enable their physical, emotional and social development needs to be met. Foster carers are clear about their role and responsibilities in promoting the health care of the children they look after. Good health outcomes can be demonstrated or anticipated for the majority of children who are fostered. The agency's practices and procedures are thorough and efficiently implemented. Foster carers receive training and support to enable them to identify and meet children's health needs. Carers work with staff of the fostering service and other key agencies and professionals to promote and secure good health care for children. The fostering service ensures that no placement is made which prevents a child from continuing to receive the specialist health care services they need. Case records demonstrate that if full details of the

child's health needs are not available before placement a high priority is given to ensure that information is obtained and passed to the foster carer once the placement is made. The fostering service is initially dependent on the information about children that is supplied by the authority responsible for the child in placement. Not every carer has clear medical consent for the child to receive medical treatment from the outset of the placement.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are placed with carers who have been assessed as being able to meet their needs. The agency ensures that initial meetings take place that identify and record the specific and detailed needs of children and the support to be provided by foster carers. The agency is aware that it uses a number of formats to produce the foster placement agreements. Not every agreement contains all the information required by Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and not all the foster placement agreements are set out in the same way. Not every carer is able to identify what is defined as the foster placement agreement or the role it plays in supporting the child and matching children with foster carers able to meet their needs. The acting manager is introducing changes to procedures to ensure that every placement has a detailed foster placement agreement. Children have access to a range of support services, including access to independent advocacy. Children are listened to, their views and experiences are taken seriously and viewed as central to a safe service. Foster carers provide children with a healthy, safe and nurturing environment. Foster carers' preparation, training and review covers health and safety issues and carers are aware of their responsibilities to provide safe care. Safe caring guidelines are provided that set out the needs of the child and the responsibilities of the foster carer. Not every child has a detailed risk assessment in circumstances where this is required by the agency's own procedures. Managers and staff are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children. Safe recruitment practices are comprehensive and thorough. The fostering panel serves children well and can demonstrate good outcomes for children. It is well managed with effective membership who understand the needs of children. The panel maintains independent scrutiny of the fostering service and provides effective and appropriate challenge where this is required.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service actively seeks to recruit carers that can meet the diverse needs of the children that it places. Its policies and procedures explicitly promote diversity and equality and its importance in achieving a high standard of care for children. Carers are given a clear and understandable plan for meeting the educational needs of children in their care. The plan details how a child's specific and general educational needs are to be addressed and the specific roles and responsibilities of others. Children receive excellent additional support which is characterised by being creative and responsive to a child's needs. Innovative and creative approaches to education that address the child's individual needs are actively promoted. The service has a flexible approach to out of school learning. This allows children to follow individual interests and make a contribution to their local community. Children are enabled and supported to continue with any previous leisure activities and are offered new opportunities for enjoying and achieving. Foster carers and staff are supervised and trained to maintain and sustain highly effective links with a child's school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has developed innovative and positive initiatives to ensure foster carers are involved in helping children make sense of their family relationships and to enable contact arrangements to be successful. Foster carers are fully aware of their responsibilities in promoting and maintaining contact. They are supported by staff to assist the child to make sense of their family contacts, particularly when problems arise in contact arrangements. Children are encouraged to have full and active involvement in all aspects of their care and there are groups and other regular opportunities for children to meet up together if they wish. Children's participation in discussions and decision making about their own futures is fully integrated into service policy and planning. Staff and carers are supported and offered training and development opportunities to think creatively and to try new approaches in encouraging children to participate and feel involved.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Carers are trained and supported to work in partnership with other services and professionals to ensure young people are prepared for moving on into independence and adulthood. Children are prepared for independence and have opportunities to develop new interests and experiences. Staff of the fostering service work well with other teams and agencies, for example, Connexions, to provide children with information and options for development and support. All foster carers receive allowances and expenses that fully meet the costs of caring for a child and meet his or her needs. Rates of payment are clear and subject to regular and ongoing review. Systems and policies are easy for carers to understand and operate and allowances are paid promptly, in full and when needed. The allowances support children to buy clothes and material goods that develop their sense of self-esteem and identity.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The values and aspirations of the fostering service are explicitly set out in the Statement of Purpose. They are evident in the day to day practice of the agency. Staff, carers and children are fully aware of the service's values and subscribe to them in all aspects of practice. Managers ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and support good practice. Managers are available to children and carers and takes active steps to ensure they obtain direct feedback from carers, children and staff. The management culture is open and inclusive as demonstrated by the way in which staff are involved in the development of practice and the ways in which the managers respond to the need to improve or develop practices and systems. This is evident in the way in which, for example, the manager introduced a system for monitoring the frequency of unannounced visitors to carers. There is a high recognition amongst managers and staff of what the service does well and where development is required. There is a clear and achievable development plan that is regularly monitored and reviewed and to which the development of the agency is demonstrably linked. Staff and carers are given clear leadership, training and excellent support and feel that their views are welcomed, valued and included. Staff and carers prioritise and are responsive to the needs of children and are able to provide a flexible and child-centred service. There are accurate and clear individual records for carers and children that contain all the information required by regulations. The service is changing

the record keeping system from paper based to computer based systems. Some aspects of effective monitoring of children's and carers' records have not been fully implemented during this changeover.

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):

- ensure that before every placement begins the carer is provided with clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment (NMS 12)
- ensure foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching identified in Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (NMS 8)
- ensure safe caring guidelines are provided for each foster home to enable the carer to protect the foster child and other children for whom they have a responsibility (NMS 9)
- review the system for monitoring the quality of records and ensure remedial action is taken where necessary. (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.