

Premier Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Helen Humphreys
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Date of last inspection	15 November 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

Premier Foster Care Limited is a small independent foster care agency, which was established in 1996 and currently has 20 carers caring for 36 children. The children and young people are placed by local authorities, mainly from the north east and north west of England. The agency offers a comprehensive support system to the carers, including access to the services of the National Teaching Advisory Service (NTAS), out of hours support system and respite care. The agency provides care on a short and medium to long-term basis for children of all ages, including babies, sibling groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements.

Summary

This is a small private fostering agency which is providing a good service to placing authorities and young people are making progress in their placements. The agency provides an excellent level of support to carers, all of whom are well known to the staff. The registered manager has been away from the service for some time but appropriate management and staffing arrangements are in place and this has not unduly affected the work of the agency. However, there has been limited opportunity for new developments. The agency is appropriately staffed by loyal and committed staff. The agency has established a new fostering panel which is currently being further developed to ensure that it is working effectively, however, this is not affecting the quality of the care provided by the carers.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Three recommendations were made at the last inspection and one has been met. This was to ensure that all appropriate information was explored during the assessment of carers. Two further recommendations which were to provide training on equality and diversity and to develop policies and procedures on independent living skills for older young people have not been met. This is due in part to the absence of the manager, although initial plans have been made. These recommendations are carried forward into this report. However, the agency has continued with other developments including the establishment of their own fostering panel, which they originally shared with Safe Houses Fostering Agency. This means that they are able to establish their own policy and procedures and quality assurance function. The agency has also appointed a support worker to provide a range of additional services to carers and they have developed new health care plans for the young people placed so that health care matters can be monitored.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency promotes the health and well-being of the young people placed. Appropriate health care information is recorded on file and provided to the carers. Carers are aware of the health care needs of the young people and these are discussed with the carers during supervision and appropriate action is taken. Young people are registered with local services including the general practitioner, dentist and optician. Carers are provided with appropriate training to support them in caring for young people, including eating disorders, first aid and adolescent mental

health. The majority of young people have had their health care assessment organised by the placing authority, however, the agency does not routinely ask for the action plans created by the Looked After Children's Nurse.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The arrangements for the recruitment and selection are appropriate. The directors and manager have suitable qualifications and experience in order to manage the agency. Appropriate and interim management arrangements have been made as a result of the manager being away from the agency due to illness. The carers are providing a good standard of care to the placing authority and young people are making good progress. Appropriate procedures are in place including health and safety checklists, safer care policies and pet care assessments. Unannounced visits are carried out by the director and recorded on file. The arrangements for matching are good and appropriate. Matching decisions are recorded on file and discussed with the manager or director prior to placements being made. There have been no placement breakdowns in the past 12 months and the majority of placements made have been planned placements with appropriate introductions and meetings with the placing authority. Carers are provided with appropriate training on child protection, behaviour management and safe care. There have been no allegations or child protection matters in the last 12 months and the agency is pro-active in respect of bullying and children reported missing from home. The agency has created a new fostering panel. The panel chair is an experienced and qualified social work practitioner. The panel has undertaken training and taken appropriate advice. The panel membership does not quite meet the Regulations in that there is no one identified as the vice chair and there is no medical advisor. A number of the administrative matters are not completely clear including the procedures and in particular those relating to change of approval of carers and panel minutes. The role of the panel advisor is not clear. However, there is capacity and commitment to ensure that the panel improves and it has already started to undertake a quality assurance function.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is an outstanding recommendation for training to be provided on equality and diversity for the carers and staff. Plans have been made but not carried out due to the absence of the manager. Matters relating to equality and diversity are discussed in the assessment of carers. Any outstanding needs relating to cultural needs are identified in the placement agreement or matching forms. The agency is particularly good in supporting carers with children with disabilities. The agency continues to have very strong links with the NTAS, who provide each young person placed with a teacher to support them in their education. The staff provide additional tutoring, help with homework, support in schools and help should a child be excluded or need to move schools. All young people have a school placement, a personal education plan and are making good progress in school, with good results in examinations and tests. Carers receive regular training on a range of educational matters.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The arrangements for contact are good. Contact is considered during the matching process and recorded on file. Contact arrangements are known to young people, carers and staff. Carers are supported to promote contact through training, supervision and practicalities including

reimbursement for transport. The agency recognises that consultation with young people is an area for development. However, young people are consulted at the time of the carers' annual reviews and staff ensure that children attend their statutory reviews or use appropriate consultation documentation. The agency arranges a number of social activities for carers and young people throughout the year where staff take the opportunity to talk to children and carers informally. All young people know how to make a complaint or who to talk to if they had any concerns. No complaints have been made to the agency in the previous 12 months.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There is an outstanding recommendation to develop appropriate policies, procedures and training for carers and staff on working with older young people on independent living skills and leaving care issues. Although this work is planned it has not been implemented as yet. However, carers are aware of many of the issues and older young people are being supported. The carers are paid above the recommended government rates for foster carers and all payments are made on time. Carers receive appropriate allowances.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

This agency is managed well. The director and manager have relevant experience and qualification in order to manage the agency. They have access to external consultation if required. The registered manager has been away from the agency due to illness but appropriate 'acting up' arrangements are in place. The Statement of Purpose has been updated and is appropriate. The Children's Guide is distributed to young people on their admission, is appropriate and includes information of how young people can contact the agency should they wish to. The agency is appropriately staffed with a team of experienced and appropriately qualified staff who are committed and loyal to the agency. Additional staff have been employed to cover for the revised management arrangements. The staff are well supported by well organised administrative staff. Staff have access to training, regular supervision and appraisal and the team meets regularly for team meetings and social events. The agency has continued to recruit carers mainly via 'word of mouth' and have a sufficient number of carers to meet the referrals to the agency and to maintain the business plan. The standard of the assessments is satisfactory and is well monitored by the agency panel and manager. The carers are well supported by the agency via training, regular visits, social events, supervision and phone calls. All carers are complimentary about the support they receive which in some cases has exceeded their expectations. This remains a strength of the agency. The administrative, carers' and young people's files are well organised and contain all the information required. They are stored securely. Carers keep appropriate documents and records.

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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30	appoint a vice chair (Regulation 24 (4))	30 March 2008
30	ensure that the panel and staff have access to appropriate medical advice in order to consider the suitability of prospective carers. (Regulation 27, Schedule 3)	30 March 2008

Recommendations

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

- obtain the health care action plans from the placing authority following the health care assessments (NMS 12.4)
- ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the panel operates appropriately and effectively (NMS 30.1)
- provide training for carers and staff on equality and diversity (NMS 7.5)
- provide training and develop appropriate policies on the development of independent living skills and leaving care issues. (NMS 14.3)

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.