

Perpetual Care/ Perpetual fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC063316
Inspection date	29 November 2007
Inspector	Sarah Oldham
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	26 June 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

The agency is situated in offices on Chorley New Road, Bolton. The area that the agency covers is mainly in the North West of England and some areas of North Wales. The offices are situated with designated office space covering ground, first and second floor. The first and second level are accessible only via stairs. There is a reception area, training area and a number of offices within the building used by the Perpetual Care Group. The agency is registered with Ofsted to provide foster care placements for children and young people 0 - 18 short term, long term, and emergency placements.

Summary

This announced inspection was undertaken by one inspector over a period of five days. The purpose of the inspection was to see how the agency promoted and supported the care of children and young people who were placed with foster carers recruited and approved by the agency. The service did not comply with The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and therefore following this inspection a number of actions and recommendations have been made. These have been made to ensure that the service supports children and young people appropriately, complies with Regulation and meets the National Minimum Standards for fostering services. The service does not have a permanent registered manager in post and there are currently only five members of staff, a temporary independent manager, three supervising social workers, two who are temporary agency staff and one administrative worker. The service also has a director responsible for the overall service. Staff currently working for the agency have the necessary qualification, skills and experience required. However, the service is unable to support and safeguard the welfare of children placed if further placements are made before additional permanent members of staff are recruited. Foster carers working for the organisation were seen to provide a good level of support and care to the young people.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency was registered in 2006. At the previous inspection the agency had a number of actions made to improve the service provided. However, these actions remain outstanding and a number of additional actions have been made. This is to ensure that the service provides a better service for young people and ensure that their safety and wellbeing is paramount. The agency is required to improve the service and support that it provides and to ensure that it meets The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is inadequate.

Health care plans are requested by the agency from the placing authority as part of the documentation required for a young person. However, not all young people have health care plans in place. Therefore, not all carers have been provided with the health care needs of the young people prior to placement. Some carers are unsure what they can consent to with regards medical attention or what they should do if the matter of treatment and consent arose. Consent for health care treatment for all young people on the files reviewed is not consistently clear.

All children and young people are registered with a doctor and dentist. Carers say that they maintain records of appointments attended and these are available to the supervising social worker as part of the supervision process for the foster carers. Foster carers supervision is not routinely recorded. Therefore, information regarding attendance at medical appointments is not clearly recorded on all children and young people's files. Training for carers regarding health care is provided by the agency as part of the overall training programme. Not all carers have had the opportunity to attend all training. Basic health care issues are discussed as part of the preparation to foster course.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The agency does not currently have a permanent manager in post. The previous registered manager resigned from the post in August 2007. Carers recruited to work for the service are assessed in accordance with British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) guidance. The agency currently pays independent assessors to undertake the assessment of foster carers. Some of the Form F assessment documents do not contain comprehensive details for the assessment. Health and safety assessments for carers have been undertaken as part of the initial assessment. However, these have not been routinely reviewed and updated as part of the carers annual review process. Carers visited as part of the inspection process are providing a good standard of accommodation and support for the young people placed with them. Young people said that they feel safe and happy within their placement. All young people seen have their own rooms that they have been supported and encouraged to personalise. Young people are also supported to practice their religion and supported with their cultural needs. Not all carers have a Safe Care Policy. Safe care policies that are in place are not personalised to the individual carers and the young people placed with them. They do not clearly demonstrate how children and young peoples safety will be promoted and supported whilst in placement. Not all carers have a current foster carer agreement in place relating to the children and young people currently placed with them. Child protection training has been undertaken by the agency although not all carers have attended this training. Record of training for carers is not consistently recorded. The agency has a behaviour management policy and procedure in place, however, this is not detailed and does not support and safeguard children effectively. The agency does not have a clear and robust procedure in place for matching and is therefore not safe. Carers spoken to said that they had been provided information verbally about the young people however, they had not always received appropriate written documentation. The agency does not routinely maintain records about the matching process and decision made regarding the placement. Placement agreements are not available for all children and young people placed with carers. This places children and young people at risk due to carers not being provided with the appropriate information to provide care and support to individual young people. The agency has experienced difficulties with recruiting and maintaining the appropriate number of suitably experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the service. A recruitment policy is in place and the agency has recently recruited additional agency staff whilst in the process of recruiting permanent members of staff. A Panel meeting was not scheduled during the inspection period, therefore this was not inspected at this inspection. A number of previous minutes of the panel were examined as part of the inspection. Panel notes do not contain clear and comprehensive reports of all decisions undertaken and why those decisions had been made. The composition of the panel does not reflect an independent membership and training for panel members is limited. Approval of carers, following the recommendation of the panel, by

the agency decision maker do not clearly specify the approval status of the carers. Not all carers receive confirmation of their approval status and foster care agreement.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is inadequate.

The agency wishes to recruit additional carers to enable them to provide a range of carers with appropriate skills to provide care and support for young people. Recruitment has currently been reduced due to the low levels of staffing at the agency. It is envisaged by the agency that when additional suitably qualified and experienced staff have been recruited then more carers will be recruited and assessed to provide care for children and young people. Carers demonstrate a good understanding of the need to promote and support the educational needs of the young people placed with them. The agency has recently appointed an education worker to provide additional support to young people. The remit of the education worker is yet to be defined and carers spoken to were not aware of the recent appointment. Not all of the children and young people have a Personal Education Plan (PEP). It is important for this to be addressed to enable young people, carers and teachers to be able to contribute to the plan to identify how the young person is to be supported with their education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Contact details and arrangements are documented on most individual young peoples files and are known to the carers and the young people. All carers are aware of the importance of contact and the impact that this has on the young person although training regarding supporting and promoting contact is not provided by the agency. The agency consults with young people and carers regarding the placement. There are currently no support groups for young people or for carers. The geographical area that the agency covers is large and not all carers and young people can access the main office easily. The agency are aware of these issues and are developing local groups to support carers and young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people receive support from carers to prepare them for independent living. The agency is developing further guidance and training for carers regarding supporting young people towards independent living. The agency has a foster care allowance that all carers are made aware of. Carers spoken to confirmed that payment of the allowance is paid in accordance with the details provided. All carers said that the allowance is paid on time.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose that identifies the aims and objectives of the service. This is provided to carers and local authorities wishing to make placements. The Statement of Purpose needs to be reviewed to ensure that current information is clearly documented, including details of staff working for the agency. The agency does not currently have a permanent registered manager in post. Currently this post is filled by an independent worker on a six month contract. The agency only has one permanent supervising social worker who works part time. A further two agency social workers have been recruited on three month contracts whilst the fostering agency implements a recruitment and retention strategy. The agency currently uses

external independent Form F assessors to assess potential foster carers. Assessment of carers has declined recently due to the limited number of supervising social workers to provide ongoing support and supervision. Most carers have received ongoing supervision although written records of supervision have not been maintained consistently. Where supervision has been recorded, carers have not been provided with a copy to enable them to read, reflect and where required respond to any issues raised. The level of support and supervision received is not in accordance with the foster care agreement. Some carers have not received any unannounced visits. The agency encourages foster carers to maintain records for the children placed with them. However, not all carers are aware of the level of recording to be undertaken. Training for carers is provided, although details of training has not been consistently recorded on foster carer files. Some carers experience difficulty attending training due to the geographical area that the agency covers. The initial preparation training for carers has been held over a two day period. It was unclear from records maintained the content of the training. Reports and observation of the skills and knowledge that the carers had demonstrated during and following the training by the trainers were incomplete and provided very limited information. Training for supervising social work and administration staff working for the agency has been limited as well as ongoing supervision and support. Team meetings have not routinely taken place. Files for foster carers and young people have not been subject to ongoing audits. This has resulted in files not containing all information as required by The Fostering Service Regulations 2002. This could impact on the service, safety and care that the young people receive.

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
12	ensure that the foster carers with whom a child is placed have information regarding the child's health care needs and the arrangements for giving consent to medical treatment (Regulation 17(3)(a)(b))	4 January 2008
3	ensure that the health and development needs of the children and young people placed is promoted (Regulation 15(1))	4 January 2008
3	ensure that a suitably qualified and experienced manager is appointed to manage the service (Regulation (6)(1))	4 January 2008
6	ensure that all information for prospective foster carers is obtained in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Fostering Regulations 2002 (Regulation 27(2)(a))	4 January 2008
6	ensure that the terms of approval of foster carers are clear and appropriately recorded (Regulation 27(4)(c))	4 January 2008
6	ensure that notice in writing specifying the terms of approval is given to foster carers (Regulation 28(5)(a))	4 January 2008

6	ensure that all foster carers have a written 'foster care agreement' containing details as specified in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 (Regulation 28(5)(b))	4 January 2008
8	ensure that the welfare of the child is safeguarded and promoted at all times when being placed with carers (Regulation 11(a)(b))	4 January 2008
9	ensure that all carers have a safe care policy that relates to them and the child/young person to be placed with them (Regulation 12(1)(a)(b))	4 January 2008
9	ensure that foster carers are aware of have a copy of the fostering agency's behaviour management policy (Regulation 13(1))	4 January 2008
30	ensure that records are maintained of the recommendation of the panel for approval of a prospective foster carer and the recommended terms of approval (Regulation 25(2))	4 January 2008
7	ensure that consideration and information is made available regarding a child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural background (Regulation 11(b)(ii))	4 January 2008
2	ensure that the manager has the necessary skills and qualifications to manage the agency and has the opportunity to undertake training to maintain and develop these skills (Regulation 8(2)(c)(3))	4 January 2008
16	ensure that all staff shall receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal (Regulation 21(4)(a)(b))	4 January 2008
17	ensure that appropriate numbers of suitably qualified and experienced staff are employed by the agency to meet the needs and safeguard the welfare of the children placed (Regulation 19(a)(b))	4 January 2008
19	ensure that appropriate training and supervision is provided for foster carers to enable them to meet the needs of the children placed (Regulation 17(1))	4 January 2008
25	ensure that records are maintained in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Fostering Regulations 2002 (Regulation 22(1))	4 January 2008

Recommendations

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

- establish a system that notifies and invites carers to contribute to children and young peoples' Personal Education Plan (PEP) (NMS13)
- should have a clear system is in place for the monitoring of foster carers files (NMS 25)
- should review policy and practice of foster care recording to ensure effective and consistent practice (NMS 24)

- should review the panel membership to ensure that it is independent (NMS 30)
- should record any correspondence with placing authorities requesting outstanding paperwork for the young person in placement (NMS 24)
- consider effective ways to involve children and young people in support groups (NMS 11)
- consider providing training to carers about the importance, support and promotion of contact for young people (NMS 10).

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.