

# Progress Children's Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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**

Progress Children's Services fostering service is part of Progress Children's Services Ltd. The fostering service has been established since 2001. The agency currently provides placements for 35 children and young people. Placements are provided by 33 approved foster carers; these foster carers represent a varied cultural, religious and linguistic background. The agency's main focus is to provide planned long term placements. However, they also provide some short term and same day placements if there is information available to allow appropriate matching with the foster carers. Bridging placements, placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and parent and baby placements are also offered by the agency.

### **Summary**

This is an announced key inspection. It focuses on the 17 key standards relevant to this agency. These include National Minimum Standards (NMS) relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of the outcomes for achieving economic wellbeing and NMS 2, 5 and 22, relating to management of the agency and the support to foster carers. Although not key standards, changes in the management and staffing of the agency has resulted in a deterioration of the operation of the agency in these specific areas. The inspection found that there had been only limited progress in meeting the NMS due to the considerable change in staff employed by the agency.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The fostering service has only made limited progress at meeting outstanding requirements from previous inspections due to the many changes of manager and staff. The current manager has endeavoured to establish a stable social worker team, who are qualified and committed to providing foster carers with appropriate support to ensure that young people are provided with high quality care. The fostering panel is now properly constituted with an experienced social worker being appointed as chair of the panel. Foster carers' annual reviews are undertaken by an independent worker and presented to the fostering panel. The fostering service has taken steps to ensure that young people are kept safe. They have introduced safe care plans for foster carers, so that foster carers are aware of what actions they must take to keep young people safe. Unannounced visits have been undertaken to ensure that foster carers are providing appropriate care to young people and foster carers have been provided with training regarding health and safety issues within their home. A resource worker has been employed to provide additional support to young people and to facilitate the gathering of young people's views regarding the service they are offered by their foster carers and supervising social workers.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

The health needs of young people are well met by their foster carers, with foster carers ensuring that young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician and that they receive regular assessments of their health. Foster carers are seen to support young people to live a healthy lifestyle by providing healthy and nutritious food and encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle.

Foster carers receive appropriate training in respect of health matters to enable them to care for the young people placed with them. The supervising social worker discusses health issues regarding young people during regular supervision visits. However, the fostering service does not always fully support foster carers in their care of young people as they do not consistently ensure that all information regarding a young person's health is gathered at the time of placement. The inspector found that the service has not always ensured that the arrangements for the consent for medical treatment have been agreed at the time of placement. This has delayed the treatment of a young person and could potentially put a young person's health at risk. A health co-ordinator has been appointed by the organisation to promote young people's health. This role has not yet been fully developed; foster carers and young people met as part of the inspection had had no contact with or knowledge of the worker.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is inadequate.

Whilst foster carers were seen to keep young people safe, by providing warm, safe environments in which young people are cared for, policies and procedures within the service are not always followed by the staff and could potentially result in the harm of a young person placed with the agency's foster carers. The agency's recruitment processes have not guaranteed that all appropriate checks have been undertaken in respect of the manager or staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people. It was not clear from the personnel files whether Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks had been returned prior to staff commencing work as CRBs had been destroyed prior to the inspection. References had not been received before some staff had commenced employment, neither was there evidence that written references had been followed up by telephone. In respect of some staff gaps in career histories had not been explored, proof of qualifications and identity were not evident on all files and there was no proof of confirmation of staff into post after a probationary period. Foster carers provide warm, welcoming and child-friendly accommodation for young people. All young people had their own bedroom, with sufficient space to allow them privacy. The fostering service undertakes health and safety checks in respect of foster carer's homes to ensure that they are safe for young people; however, they have not always been undertaken on an annual basis as required. This could result in young people being harmed. Young people's needs were being well met by the foster carers they were placed with. Where placements were planned, there had been the opportunity for information to be shared with all parties and introductions to take place. However, the fostering service is unable to evidence, in all cases, the reasons why a young person was matched with their foster carers. Some young people were placed with foster carers outside the carer's approval range; this could potentially result in young people's needs not being met. The service does not always obtain all appropriate information regarding young people at the referral stage. Whilst there was evidence that the fostering service does request placing authorities to provide missing information this is often received many months after the placement. Risk assessments are not being consistently undertaken as required, for example where there is evidence of sexual abuse. These omissions could potentially leave young people at risk of abuse. Young people's welfare is safeguarded through the child protection procedures operated by the agency. Staff have considerable experience of child protection issues and were confident that appropriate steps would be taken to ensure the safety of all young people. Foster carers are provided with child protection training and guidance within the foster carer's handbook regarding child protection issues. The fostering service has started to develop safe caring plans in conjunction with foster carers, however, plans are not consistently updated when a young person is placed with foster carers or discussed with the placing social worker.

This could potentially result in young people not being appropriately cared for and kept safe as appropriate plans are not in place. The fostering service had made changes to the fostering panel so that its composition is compliant with the regulations; members demonstrate a wide range of expertise, knowledge, experience and background. The panel is chaired by an experienced and knowledgeable chair. Nonetheless, the fostering panel has on occasions, been persuaded to approve foster carers where checks have not been fully completed or where the panel has felt that the assessment is not sufficiently robust. It was not possible to observe a fostering panel as the November panel was cancelled.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is satisfactory.

Staff and foster carers contribute significantly to ensuring that young people have a wide range of opportunities to enjoy and achieve educationally and in their leisure pursuits. The service has a wide range of approved foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds; this reflects the local community, and enables young people's specific needs regarding their culture or ethnicity to be met. There is evidence that cultural and ethnicity issues are taken into consideration when making placements with most placements being culturally, racially and religiously appropriate, where this is not the case, carers are given support to meet any gaps identified. None of the young people visited as part of the inspection were trans-racially placed. Previous inspections have found that foster carers and the fostering service have met the needs of young people with disabilities, supporting and encouraging young people to fully participate in the local community. Foster carers receive training in respect of diversity and the foster carers' handbook gives clear guidance as to the agency's expectations. The fostering service has arranged a cultural evening to encourage foster carers, staff and young people to celebrate diversity. The positive attitude to diversity displayed by the service, supported by skills, training and positive recruitment promotes the self-esteem of young people placed within the fostering service. Young people are well supported to achieve educationally by their foster carers and the fostering service. All young people visited were attending either school or college. Evidence from files and discussion with young people and foster carers, confirmed that foster carers had worked hard to ensure that the young people have a suitable educational placement. The fostering service's foster placement agreement does not clarify who can give consent for school trips. Consequently young people have been unable to attend school trips, which potentially could restrict their educational development and limits their involvement with peers within the school setting. The fostering service has employed an educational co-ordinator who has worked with young people's schools to ensure that all young people have a Personal Education Plan. The co-ordinator produces regular educational reports to inform the company of the progress being made by the young people in relation to their education. She also undertakes training with foster carers as to how they can support young people with their education. Young people are encouraged to partake in a wide range of social activities to develop their self-esteem.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Young people are well supported by their foster carers and the fostering service regarding their contact with family and friends. The fostering service ensures that information regarding young people's contact arrangements is discussed at the time of placement, to ensure that foster carers are able to meet the requirements of young people's contact with family and friends. The arrangements for contact are recorded on all files and a risk assessment is included in the

foster placement agreement, where this has been completed. Foster carers are expected to record the impact of contact on the young people and this is shared with the placing authority. Foster carers receive training in respect of the importance of contact as part of the pre-approval training and contact is discussed as part of the regular supervision visits. Young people reported that they are always listened to by their foster carers regarding their day-to-day care. Young people are also encouraged to express their views as part of the foster carer's annual review. The resource worker plays a critical role in seeking young people's views and has arranged different structures for young people to contact her. This includes group activities, individual visits, e-mail and telephone texting. This ensures that all young people are able to express their views and if necessary make a complaint about their care. The Children's Guide contains clear information about how to make a complaint and the support available to them. Foster carers are given the opportunity to express their views regarding the development of the fostering service. Two foster carers act as representatives of the group of foster carers and meet regularly with managers of the service to look at how the service can improve the support available to both young people and foster carers.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are supported to develop skills to enable them to successfully move into adulthood. Foster carers play an active part in developing and implementing young people's pathway plans. Foster carers are provided with training and written guidance regarding their role in supporting young people in their preparation for independence. Foster carers receive prompt payment, which are in line with Fostering Network's recommended rate. Foster carers reported that allowances met the needs of the young people they care for.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is inadequate.

The service has experienced an extremely high turn over of managers and staff in the past 12 months. This has significantly affected the level of support available to both foster carers and young people. The fostering service has a detailed Statement of Purpose, which accurately reflects the aims of the agency and the range of placements made. A children's guide has been produced to inform young people about the aims of Progress Children's Services and the help and support they can expect whilst placed with the agency's foster carers. This has not been updated to reflect the inspectorates move to Ofsted nor is it available in a simpler form for younger or less able children. Young people visited stated that they had not received a copy of the Children's Guide and could result in young people not being aware of the help and support available to them. At the time of the inspection the fostering service did not have a Registered Manager in post, with the two previous managers leaving without making an application to Ofsted to become registered. The current manager is in the process of making an application to become registered. Neither the manager nor the acting Regional Manager have experience of working within the fostering field, although they both have substantial experience of working within a wide range of children's service both as practitioner and manager. This lack of knowledge could potentially result in the appropriate support not being provided to staff, young people and foster carers. The manager has developed a system of monitoring the service to ensure that the service continues to improve the quality of foster care provided by the agency, however, this is not robust and does not evidence what action will be taken to improve the service. Audits of files have concentrated on whether appropriate records and

documents are on file rather than considering their content. Whilst Ofsted have been notified of some significant incidents, not all have been notified, although there has been an improvement in recent months. These issues may result in a lack of appropriate monitoring of the service provided to foster carers and young people. Policies and procedures identify clear delineation of roles and responsibilities within the service, with staff being aware of their roles, however, lines of accountability are not always clear as the Managing Director is on occasions involved in operational matters. The service employs three social workers and one resource worker in addition to one administrative worker. Whilst this number is sufficient to provide adequate support to foster carers and young people, the rapid change in staff has resulted in some foster carers having four or five different supervising social workers in less than a year. This has resulted in inconsistent practice, lack of support to foster carers and young people, and issues not being robustly followed up. One young person reported that agreed life story work had not been undertaken due to changes of staff. Independent social workers are used to undertake assessments of prospective foster carers. The inspector found that not all assessments have been of a consistently high standard, this has been affected by a lack of appropriate supervision and gate keeping from the manager. In the majority of cases, due to the robust monitoring of the Fostering Panel, gaps in assessments have been followed up to ensure that foster carers are suitable and young people are placed with appropriate carers. The agency has a wide range of foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, who are able to meet the needs of young people placed with the agency. The agency recognises that a number of their foster carers do not have the experience to provide adequate care to young people with more challenging behaviour and intend to undertake a recruitment campaign for new foster carers; a new worker has been appointed to lead this campaign. The staff were clear regarding their role in supporting foster carers and the need to ensure that the young person's social worker is kept informed of the young person's progress and any significant events. The service has improved the management of the annual review of foster carers and these are undertaken by an independent person and then present to the fostering panel. Unannounced visits have been undertaken to all foster carers but due to staff shortages foster carers have not been supervised in line with the service's procedures. The Foster Care Agreement has not been updated for all foster carers regarding the agency's expectations in relations to a period of representation after a recommendation that a foster carer's approval is terminated. Files for both foster carers and young people were not well organised with gaps in recording, due to inconsistent input from so many different workers. However, improvements were noted in the quality of the recording in recent months. The service is not routinely completing a foster placement agreement, which covers all required areas. The format for recording information regarding a young person and the plans for the placement is inconsistent. This could result in foster carers not being clear as to what work they are expected to undertake with a young person. The fostering service has moved its service to its current premises since the last inspection. The office does not provide sufficient space for the service to operate effectively.

## **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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12	ensure that as part of the foster placement agreement arrangements for the consent to treatment and delegation of consent are clearly recorded. This must be included on all young people's files. Timescale of 6 March 2006 not met. Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6	7 January 2008
8	ensure that before making a placement, the agency enters into a written agreement (foster placement agreement) with the responsible authority, which covers all matters specified in Schedule 6 including elements of matching. Timescale of 14 March 2005 not met. Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6	7 January 2008
8	ensure that all young people are placed within a foster carer's approval range. Regulation 33(b)	7 January 2008
15	ensure that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation. Regulation 21 (1)	7 March 2008
15	ensure that the record of persons working for the fostering service includes all required elements. Timescale of 1 May 2005 not met. Regulation 20 Schedule 1.	7 January 2008
30	ensure that a thorough assessment has been completed as to the suitability of applicants, including appropriate check, before approving applicants as foster carers. Regulation 27	7 February 2008
13	ensure that as part of the foster placement agreement that there is agreement as to who can give consent for educational trips. Regulation 34 (3) Schedule 6	7 January 2008
1	ensure that the Children's Guide includes details of how to contact Ofsted and that the updated guide is distributed as required by the Fostering Services Regulation 2002. Timescale of 01 April 2005 not met. Regulation 3 (4)	7 February 2008
2	ensures that the manager undertakes appropriate training to provide her with appropriate knowledge and understanding of fostering. Regulation 8 (3)	7 March 2008
5	explore and take positive action to address the continued instability in management and staffing of the agency. Regulations 6 and 19	7 January 2008
5	ensure that lines of accountability are clear and that such procedures are followed in all circumstances. Regulation 6	7 February 2008
16	operate clear structures and systems to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively. Regulation 42 Schedule 7	7 January 2008
22	ensure that foster carers are regularly supervised in line with the agency's policies and procedures. Regulation 17	7 January 2008

22	ensure that the Foster Care Agreement is amended to allow for a period of representation after a recommendation that a foster carer's approval is terminated. Regulation 29 (7)	7 February 2008
24	ensure that a foster placement agreement is completed for all young people, which covers all required issues. Regulation 34 (3)	7 January 2008

## Recommendations

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

- ensure that CRB checks are retained until they have been examined by the inspector. NMS 15
- ensure that a review of the safety of foster carer's home is undertaken on an annual basis. NMS 6
- take all possible steps to ensure that all information is available at the time of placement. NMS 8
- ensure that safe caring guidelines are reviewed in light of any young person placed with foster carers. A copy should be kept on file and the guidelines should be cleared with the child's social worker and explained clearly and appropriately to the young person. NMS 9
- produce a simpler version of the Children's Guide to meet the needs of younger or less able young people. NMS 1
- ensure that the agency's system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 is robust and results in the improvement in the service. NMS 4
- consider arrangements within the office to ensure that there is sufficient space for the service to operate effectively. NMS 26

## 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.**