

Integrated Services Programme

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Inspector | Sophie Wood |
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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

Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Kent is an independent fostering agency, with additional registered offices based in Buckinghamshire, Sussex and Enfield. The head office for the entire organisation is based at Sittingbourne in Kent and centres serving the Kent region are located in Teynham, Whitstable and Rainham. All of the centres have a centre manager and a team of qualified social workers. Foster carers receive additional support from fostering advisors. The organisation provides a wide range of services, including social work support for foster carers and those in placement, a range of therapeutic services, educational support and assistance with transport and contact. Foster carers provide long term, short term, task centred, respite and permanent care. At the time of this inspection, the Kent provision has 194 approved foster places, with 118 filled.

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted by two inspectors over five days. All of the key National Minimum Standards were inspected, as well as a number of others. The one requirement and five recommendations made from the previous inspection were reviewed. These had all been implemented. The agency continues to robustly review its own practice and seeks to improve wherever possible. This results in excellent outcomes for children, young people and their foster carers.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Health records for children and young people have been updated to ensure they hold all of the required information. The strategy for supervising and supporting foster carers has been reviewed and updated. This has been underpinned with training for the staff team. Other policies and procedures continue to be subject to ongoing review, with new ones currently being ratified, for example, support for individuals to give up smoking. A children's board has been recently established and one for foster carers is planned. Records of unannounced visits to fostering households are being evidenced more clearly and file audits have been updated and placed at the front of files to ensure they are readily visible.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people benefit by having their primary and tertiary health needs assessed and met. They are registered with local health care services and appropriate referrals are made to secure any necessary specialist input. Clear emphasis is equally placed upon meeting the emotional and psychological needs of children and young people, with a pool of professionally qualified therapists available. The ongoing maintenance of clear and accurate records ensures all illnesses, accidents and ongoing health needs are robustly monitored and shared with placing authorities. Annual medicals, immunisations and routine appointments are being recorded. Foster carers receive the training and support they need to equip them to meet the health needs of those in their care. Courses such as first aid and health promotion are mandatory and individual specific training is also provided on a needs led basis, for example, the management of epilepsy. Great emphasis is placed upon promoting a healthy lifestyle. Households are

encouraged to provide healthy meals and engage in regular physical activities. Children and young people report positively and knowledgeably on this aspect through their completed surveys. A designated health care advisor is in post and strong links exist with local Looked After Children (LAC) nurses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency is effectively led by a competent, suitably qualified management team. Excellent ongoing training opportunities for staff, combined with research and links with professional organisations, ensures practice and knowledge within the agency remains current and innovative. Robust recruitment and vetting processes for potential foster carers places children and young people in safe nurturing households. The quality of ongoing supervisory visits and annual reviews provides additional safeguards. Staff of the agency are also subject to vigorous recruitment procedures. All personnel are suitably vetted, with all necessary checks received before they are able to join the agency. Such staff possess the skills, qualifications and experience commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. Children and young people are protected from all forms of potential harm and abuse through the sound application of child protection policies and procedures. Staff and foster carers understand these and receive regular ongoing training. All records of allegations, complaints and concerns are robustly monitored and shared with appropriate external agencies; this demonstrates honesty and transparency. Foster carers are provided with appropriate support in the event of an allegation being made against them and membership with the Fostering Network is provided. All fostering households implement their own safe care policies; these are subject to ongoing review and amendment and are tailored to meet the needs of each child or young person in placement. Matching processes are sound. The skills and experiences of potential foster carers are very carefully researched before a placement is considered. Records show referrals being turned down if a suitable placement cannot be found, despite the agency having households with vacancies. The work of the multi - disciplinary admissions panel tracks and monitors all potential and new admissions into the service. This forum is also used to track and monitor longer term placements presenting particular issues or difficulties. The fostering panel is effective. Led by a competent independent chair person, members are encouraged to debate and scrutinise all panel business, before recommendations are made. There is a good broad range of skills and experiences among the group, who have all been subject to the same robust recruitment process as any other staff member. Members work to clear procedures and terms of reference. They receive appropriate training and as well as dealing with approvals and annual reviews, retain a quality assurance role, by being asked for their views on matters of principle by the agency. Minutes of previous panel meetings are of good quality; these are clear, concise and completed by an individual who has received appropriate training. There are examples of minor recommendations being made by the panel and it is not clear the agency has reported back to the panel to confirm this work has been completed, although records held elsewhere show that it has.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency values diversity among all its stakeholders. Clear and effective policies and procedures are implemented in practice and these are underpinned by core training. The agency strives to recruit staff and foster carers from a range of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and these aspects are carefully considered within matching processes. Children and young

people with additional and complex care and support needs are equally valued and the agency provides them with the services they need. Educational achievement is effectively promoted. The service has its own school provision, which provides education for some of the children and young people of the agency, as well as other looked after children from the wider community. The educational senior management team also provides input, training and support across the whole service. Foster carers say this aspect is invaluable. Wherever possible, children and young people attend mainstream provision and where necessary, additional support is provided. Records show children and young people are in the provision that is meeting their needs, whether this is the service provision, mainstream school and college or special schools. Attendance and attainment is effectively monitored through supervision visits and foster carers are fully aware of their responsibilities to positively promote education. They do this in practice and act as real advocates for those in their care.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency actively promotes and supports positive family contact. Children and young people benefit by living with foster carers who understand the value and importance of this. Care files hold clear and explicit details, including any legal requirements and a team of three contact supervisors is effectively line managed by a contact coordinator. Supervisors receive training and supervision and are carefully matched to the children and young people they provide a service for. All proposed contact meetings are risk assessed and the agency is able to provide transport and suitable venues. Foster carers know they can access 24 hour support and advice in the event of difficult contact issues and written records of contact visits are clear, appropriate and informative. Clear and effective consultation forums are in place for all stakeholders. Examples include regular children's forums, which are themed; recent ones have been a hip hop dance and an art workshop. A comprehensive monthly newsletter is distributed across the whole organisation and a 'Children Who Foster' committee has just been established. Feedback received from children's and young people's surveys indicates they know how to complain within and outside of the agency. Clear and age appropriate written guidance for children and young people further assists this. With regards literature aimed at younger children, this does not currently feature photographs of key personnel within the agency who are involved in dealing with complaints. Upon first entering the service, children may not meet such staff for some time, therefore emphasis on visual information is beneficial. Weekly support groups are offered to all foster carers and their views and opinions are further canvassed through their annual reviews.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive the guidance and support they need to effectively prepare them for adulthood. The agency's principle advisor on health and leaving care retains a clear monitoring role on this aspect of service provision, which starts to assess independent living skills at age 15. This information is effectively shared with placing authorities to assist with pathway planning. Foster carers currently receive appropriate training and advice, however this is continuing to develop further, with 'Am I Bothered' adolescence training planned for the new year. Effective systems are in place to ensure foster carers receive their agreed allowances and expenses accurately and on time. In the main, foster carers report no complaints, however, a small number of returned surveys describe dissatisfaction with regards changes made to savings for children

and young people. Written records indicate this decision has been influenced by good practice guidance from the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and Pan London and has been gradually introduced to foster carers through the agency's consultation forums and individual supervision visits.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The organisation is effective, innovative and child - centred. The Statement of Purpose is accurate and clear, with underpinning policies and procedures subject to ongoing review. Guides are produced for children and young people in formats they understand. Practice is up to date and influenced by current legislation and good practice guidance. Individual team members continue to question and seek to improve. Service managers adopt an inclusive leadership style and staff are effectively deployed. Their caseloads are manageable and they possess the skills they need to fulfil their roles. Foster carers receive good quality supervision, support and training. A clear strategy for supervising and supporting foster carers is continuing to develop. This describes the differing roles of supervising social workers and foster carer advisors. Ongoing career progression for foster carers and agency staff is encouraged. Opportunities exist for continued professional development. Sound communication systems are effectively used across the organisation. This ensures a holistic team approach for every child and young person in placement is achieved. It also means that issues and concerns are expediently shared and dealt with. Administrative data is easily retrievable, however a number of staff members comment on over reliance of information being printed and over duplicated. There is a sufficient number of administrative personnel who confirm they are provided with the resources and time they need to complete their work to an excellent standard. Care files are securely held and contain the information that is required.

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):

- continue to develop clear plans of working between supervising social workers and foster carer advisors (NMS 21).
- ensure the panel receives confirmation that any of its recommendations for action are clearly reported back to the panel once completed (NMS 30).
- consider the value of further developing electronic methods of information sharing (NMS 25).
- consider the value of adding photographs of key management personnel to literature for children and young people (NMS 11).

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.