

Parallel Parents Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sue Winson
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Care Today Childrens Services Lansdowne House 85 Buxton Road STOCKPORT Cheshire SK2 6LR
Telephone number	0161 477 5830
Email	
Registered person	Parallel Parents Ltd
Registered manager	Sinead Leone Lewis
Responsible individual	Vivien Snape
Date of last inspection	7 December 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

Parallel Parents is an independent fostering agency which is privately owned. There is a sister company, Care Today, which operates children's homes in the area. The agency has carers who live mainly in the north west of England and the midlands. The agency offers a comprehensive support system to the carers, including access to an education service, 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, siblings groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements. The agency also offers disability placements. Fees vary according to the type of placement and the care package provided.

Summary

This announced inspection took place over one week. The agency has acted upon the single requirement and the majority of good practice recommendations made at the last inspection. No requirements have been made as a result of this inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Written references are obtained for all foster carers and personal references are interviewed, according to the agency's policies and procedures. The agency better demonstrates that outcomes for young people are largely positive. Management monitoring and auditing systems ensure that young people's needs are identified and are being met. Placement planning trackers are developed from the foster placement agreement and are an effective planning tool which informs written reports for statutory reviews and planning meetings. Disruption meetings have begun to take place to allow the agency to examine its practice, including matching procedures. Unannounced visits to foster homes are being monitored to ensure they take place annually. Systems are in place which ensure that full written information is gained from local authorities on children placed. Support to foster carers has been augmented through regular respite arrangements which do not cause disruption for young people. The agency's training strategy includes arrangements for all foster carers to undertake child protection training. Training has been provided to the panel members and administrator. There has been a clarification of staff roles and responsibilities and new job descriptions are in place which reflect the work they do.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The agency can demonstrate that young people's health and developmental needs are identified and met. The amount and quality of written health information received from placing social workers has improved due to the agency being active and persistent in their requests. Annual health assessments are carried out, unless young people choose not to attend. The agency uses a placement tracking tool which outlines health and emotional needs, how they will be met, which includes action planning. Foster Care Development Workers (FCDW) and foster carers commented on its usefulness in care planning and monitoring outcomes for children. It is also used by the manager as an auditing tool. Children and young people are registered with dentists, doctors and opticians and receive specialised health services that they need. Foster carers work in partnership with health professionals, are vigilant in monitoring children's health and

development and take appropriate actions as necessary. They inform the agency in writing of any health issues. Training on first aid is provided to foster carers. Foster carers are clear about their role in promoting healthy living and are active in encouraging young people to eat a healthy diet and take regular exercise. Young people were positive in their comments.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The manager and responsible individual are suitable to carry out a fostering service. The manager has considerable experience and holds a social work qualification. Personnel files for the manager, staff and panel members contain records of all necessary checks and demonstrate that Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are renewed every three years. The agency can demonstrate that their policies and procedures for the assessment, approval and review of foster carers are largely carried out in practice. All necessary checks and references are received prior to panel considering applications and are updated regularly. Family and friends who provide support to foster carers are also checked rigorously. Foster carers provide a healthy and nurturing environment. Health and safety assessments are carried out during the assessment process and are reviewed annually, including checks on vehicles used to transport children. Where appropriate, specific risk assessments are compiled and monitored. Foster carers focus on keeping children safe and discuss issues, such as stranger danger with them. Not all foster carers have yet completed child protection training. The agency's training strategy is in place to remedy this. The quality of foster placement agreements has improved and includes matching considerations. They clearly outline the agency's own responsibilities and their expectations of foster carers. Careful matching is evident in practice. Where possible planning meetings and introductions take place prior to a child moving in. Additional information and support has been provided where young people are of a different ethnic background and religion. There is a focus on safeguarding young people. Each foster carer has individualised safe caring guidelines which they explain to children. Foster carers receive training in child protection and safe care and notify the agency of any significant events or concerns. Foster carers are trained in positive behaviour management and FCDW monitor their practice on supervisory and support visits. The manager has systems in place which allow her to monitor complaints, child protection issues and the welfare of children. Foster carer reviews take place annually at foster carers' homes and are chaired by a foster care development worker who is not involved in the case. Written records of reviews are considered at the fostering panel. The agency has a history of effective scrutiny and consideration by its fostering panels. They are properly constituted and include people with a variety of relevant experience. Members of panel have been subject to necessary checks. Minutes demonstrate that the panels exercise effective scrutiny and have a quality assurance function. Panel members and the administrator have undertaken training.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency can demonstrate that diversity is valued and that young people's cultural, ethnic and religious needs are being met. Foster carers and FCDW's have been active in accessing appropriate resources and services. A translation service is used to ensure that young people, whose first language is not English, have leaflets and information in another language. The educational and leisure needs of young people are promoted. Management systems are in place to allow for monitoring of outcomes and demonstrate that appropriate education placements are provided and that young people are attending and achieving. Educational support is available

within the agency and foster carers said that this is a useful resource. Foster carers attend all educational meetings and school events.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency can demonstrate that contact is promoted. The arrangements for contact are included in the placement agreement and FCDW's and foster carers are committed to supporting children to maintain relationships with friends and family members. Examples were given where foster carers and support workers actively support contact arrangements and where possible, work in partnership with parents. The agency consults with foster carers, young people and their social workers in a variety of ways, including written contributions to foster carer reviews and informally on agency fun days. FCDW's regularly see young people on their visits to foster homes. Young people are encouraged to attend and contribute to their reviews and are encouraged to express their wishes and preferences on a day to day basis. Foster carers are involved in decision making and are regularly consulted about the service they receive and future development. Recently, as a result of listening to carers a system for regular respite has been put into place.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are prepared for adulthood and are encouraged and supported to develop life skills. The agency is formalising this process through the use of a pack which provides clear guidance and which is skills based in a clear and factual way. Foster carers balance the need for independence with safety issues. Young people have pathway plans. Foster carers receive training in leaving care planning. All the young people have savings accounts. Written information and the foster care agreements give clear information about financial issues. Foster carers are paid regularly and on time.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the agency which outlines the services they provide and the manager monitors its functioning through a range of auditing tools. The service is managed effectively and efficiently. There is a clear management structure and workloads are monitored and work allocated according to priorities. Staff said that their caseloads are manageable and assessments and reviews are completed in a timely manner. The agency has a pool of experienced staff who are appropriately qualified for the roles they carry out. Staff are effectively supervised and said that the manager and colleagues are available and accessible for support. Staff have job descriptions which accurately outlines their roles and responsibilities. Team and area meetings take place, are well organised and work to a standing agenda which includes in-house training. Foster carer assessments are improving but remain variable in the detail they contain and the analysis of information. Not all staff who carry out assessments have yet received full training. The range of training for staff and foster carers continues to improve and carers are encouraged and supported to gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). Foster carers made positive comments about the range and value of training available to them. The agency provides supervision and support to carers who expressed high levels of satisfaction. Records of contact with foster carers and supervisory visits are kept, which do not always reflect the high levels of support received by foster carers. FCDW's are

clear about their roles in supporting and supervising foster carers. Records are maintained as required and files are well ordered and information is easy to locate. The premises suitable and provide safe storage of confidential material. Accounts demonstrate that the agency is financially viable.

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 staff receive training on the assessment of foster carers (NMS 19)
- ensure that all foster carers complete child protection training. (NMS 9)

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.