

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Claudette Morgan
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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 Birmingham branch of SWIIS was registered on 28th May 2004. The service aims to provide a wide range of foster placements from the diverse backgrounds that reflect the demographic population of the locality. The remit of the service is to provide short and long term placements for children and young people between the ages of 0-21 years. The service has recently moved to premises in the Edgbaston area of Birmingham. The offices are situated over two floors in a converted 19th Century property, which has been fully modernised. There is full access for wheelchair users on the ground floor. The service provides additional support workers to complete one to one work with children. All placements receive an educational support package for which the service has a team of six teachers and one education support workers. There is also a health advisor to support carers in meeting the health care needs of children and young people.

Summary

This announced inspection took place to follow up the actions and recommendations of the last inspection. The inspection mainly focused on the key standards. The agency has made improvements since the last inspection. Carers, children and young persons are happy with the service they receive. Achieving the best outcomes for children and young people is central to the aims and objectives of the agency. Children and young people receive excellent individual support for their care and educational needs. Carers are supported by staff that are committed, experienced and qualified. A small number of recommendations were made where practice could be further developed.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has worked hard to progress the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. The staff, carers and young people feel the agency is committed to the ongoing development of the service. Internal medical consent forms have been developed to ensure all children and young people have signed medical consent. Systems are in place to ensure all necessary safety checks are completed as part of the assessment process prior to carers being approved. Improvements have been made to the recording of Panel decisions to ensure the comments of all Panel members are accurately recorded. All Panel members have been provided with relevant guidance and training on the revised Panel process. Clear systems exist that ensure carers are aware of the minimum training requirements they are expected to complete. Policies and procedures have been revised to provide clear guidance on complaints, matching and health and safety.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

SWIIS places a strong emphasis on the promotion of children's health and development. They ensure that the health and development needs of children in their care are being clearly identified and met, both at the referral stage and through to the matching process. The service has excellent health support to children and carers through a health adviser who is a qualified nurse. The health advisor plays a major role from the moment the placement begins and support is

offered throughout the placement. The nurse plays a major role at reviews ensuring that all medical checks and appointments are followed through and monitors any areas that need addressing. One to one support is offered to young people if identified, for example issues around sexual health and young people from the age of 11 receive a health filofax which is a personal diary of their individual health needs. Carers keep up to date records of visits to the doctor, dentist and any other medical appointments and also of any accidents, incidents and administration of medication. These records are checked during their supervision visits and monitored monthly by the agency. The service has introduced a new medical consent form which is good practice but there are still some of the 'Looked After Children' paperwork which is not completed and consent to emergency treatment and medication is still not being signed by the placing authority. The service has a range of clear policies, procedures and staff guidance which helps to ensure the promotion of children's health and wellbeing. They have introduced a new policy on invasive care which supports the carers with children who have specific health care needs. The health and wellbeing of children is further ensured through a comprehensive training programme and a variety of health workshops and carers days.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency offers effective protection to children. It achieves this through the vetting of staff, foster carers and panel members, ensuring assessments of foster carers are rigorously tested. It makes sure foster homes are safe and secure so that children are well matched to their foster carers. SWIIS employs qualified and experienced managers and fostering workers. Foster carers are fully assessed and receive preparation training and panel approval prior to becoming approved foster carers. They have a diverse range of carers with a variety of skills and experience enabling them to meet the complex needs and challenges of the children placed with them. Carers are supervised at least monthly and some visits are unannounced. Carers commented that they found the support received from supervising social workers beneficial. The service has good systems in place which ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Children are generally well matched with their foster carers and this enables their overall needs to be met. Consideration is given to ensure all matches are appropriate with regard to age, gender, ethnicity and disability. The referral form clearly considers the matching process and any matching shortfall is addressed through appropriate training or specific support, which is well documented on the referral form. Carers receive appropriate training in the safeguarding and protection of children that equips them with the resources to report child protection concerns. Records demonstrate that appropriate action is taken to manage allegations of child protection. Good working together practice and procedures with placing authorities are evident. Children are able to use the complaints procedure regarding their concerns. Children are provided with a safe, warm and homely environment to live in. Safety is ensured by annual health and safety checks and risk assessments. Any areas of risk are followed up by the supervising social workers. Comprehensive risk assessments and safe care plans are in place for all children. These are completed alongside the referral form and are reviewed on a regular basis. These are good tools to ensure children are safeguarded within their placements and ensure the individual needs of every child are considered. Staff and carers are given a comprehensive selection of policies and procedures to positively promote protective care practices. The agency further promotes the protection of children by providing mandatory training in child protection and self care. The service has robust systems in place to ensure the appropriate assessment, recruitment and vetting of staff and foster carers. Five staff files were inspected and these procedures include confirmation of, verbal and written references, Criminal Record Bureau

checks, proof of identity, qualifications, application and interview forms. The application forms disclosed some small gaps in the work history. All staff have to satisfied vetting checks prior to their employment at the agency. The director and manager are present on all recruitment panels. All care staff are suitably qualified with social work qualifications. Opportunities to engage in further training to enhance their role is available. Observation of the fostering panel confirm that all contributions are accurately recorded. Review of the panel process had occurred since the last inspection. The panel chair has several years experience in social work management at a senior level and is fully aware of his role and responsibilities. The panel members are from various disciplines with a range of knowledge and experience. The manager acts as the panel adviser. The panel has a current vacancy for a foster carer and action is being taken to address this. Panel members receive appropriate training. The panel also maintains a quality assurance role.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Diversity is valued within the service. Staff and carers receive appropriate training in promoting equality and valuing diversity. Visits to carers confirm they are equipped to understand and meet the needs of children from diverse backgrounds. Children are supported and encouraged to maintain their religion and cultural identity. Resource workers carry out identity work with children. Carers also demonstrate a clear understanding of the need to promote and enable children with disabilities to be independent. The staff team are also diverse and largely reflects the carers, children and young people served. Every effort is made to enable children and young people to maximise their potential in education by dedicated staff. Excellent resources are in place to support children through their education. Children receive weekly input from a team of qualified teaching staff employed by the agency as case workers. Specific action is taken to assess and meet the individual educational needs of children and young people. Good relationships exist between schools, education resource and case workers. Young people have exceeded the national recommended achievement level for 'Looked After Children' to obtain 5 GCSE grades A to C. Carers and children spoke positively about the support they received with their education. Young people feel fully supported and encouraged by their carers to attend their education placement. Carers homes visited have excellent resources for children to complete homework. In-house personal education plans exist for all children and young people in education. Robust action is taken to chase up missing Personal Education Plans. Young people are actively encouraged to pursue leisure interests by their foster carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The policies, procedures and practices of SWIIS ensure that children are able to maintain where appropriate their past relationships whilst in foster care. They also enable children to have a voice in their overall care. Likewise SWIIS encourage the foster carers to positively contribute to the practice of the agency. The service makes sure that each child is encouraged to maintain contact with family and friends as set out in their care plan. There are clear written details on file regarding contact arrangements and these are regularly reviewed. The foster carers' handbook also sets out how contact arrangements are to be established, maintained and reviewed. SWIIS supports their carers in dealing with any difficulties over contact and the placing authorities organise and facilitate most contact arrangements. Foster carers show sensitivity to children following contact visits that are upsetting for them. Appropriate records

are maintained concerning contact. Pre-approval training highlights the importance of positive contact and this is further reinforced through the carer's supervision sessions and reviews. Foster carers and the service encourage children to express their views regarding their overall care. All children have the opportunity to contribute to their reviews and this can be accomplished by using the specific form implemented by the service on line. Link workers also visit the children every four weeks and this provides further opportunities for children to express their views about the placement. The service also employs support workers who undertake a variety of one to one direct work with the children which provides yet another opportunity for children to say how things are within their placement. A team of experienced support workers provide individual support for children to enable them to understand their situation. The work undertaken includes life story and identity work where it is considered to be beneficial. Samples of the work undertaken by support workers demonstrate creativity and good awareness of the specific needs of young people. A variety of group activities are offered to children and young people during the school holidays. Workshops are also on the agenda but these are not well subscribed to. The agency is currently looking at ways to increase consultation with young people. Initiatives such as star of the week are in place to reward the achievements of children and young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The foster carers' handbook contains clear policies and procedures in place regarding preparing young people for independence. Carers also receive training in this area. Some concern exists regarding delays in the completion of pathway plans from placing authorities and this is followed up by supervising social workers. Young people preparing for independence commented that they feel well supported in this area. Some young people have commenced further education and others have started work placements. Essential skills in budgeting and meal preparation are provided. Support finding semi-independent accommodation is also available. Carers liaise with key agencies to ensure tasks identified in the pathway plan are completed. Clear policies, procedures and guidelines are in place regarding foster care allowances. Foster cares are paid above the minimum rate identified in guidance from the Fostering Network. Carers are fully aware of the allowance available to them for all aspects of the child's care. The agency ensures all payments are paid within the required timescales. Carers also confirm that payments are always on time. Carers are encouraged to open bank accounts for children and young people. Pocket money is available to young people. Children and young people are consulted about their choice of clothing and personal requisites.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose has been revised since the last inspection and provides an accurate account of what the agency sets out to do. Some minor amendments are necessary to reflect recent changes. Policies and procedures have been developed in line with the overall aims and objectives of the agency. A new children's guide is in place that is accessible to children and young people. The format is child friendly and contains useful information about the service. Arrangements are made, as required, to ensure the guide is accessible to children and young people whose first language is not English or have learning disabilities. SWIIS is organised in a way which delivers an effective service to children and foster carers with some excellent outcomes for children being achieved. It is an integrated service which addresses their educational needs

as part of the overall package of care. Managers have the necessary skills, experience and qualifications to manage the agency. Good systems are in place to ensure that regular monitoring takes place to further improve the quality of care to children. There are shortfalls in monitoring systems concerning the overall responsibility of ensuring all Looked After Children's documentation is in order. Child protection concerns and complaints are dealt with appropriately. Clear management structures are in place that include levels of accountability. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisals. Professional development is encouraged and staff are able to attend relevant training to enhance their role and meet the needs of the service. Currently the majority of assessments are carried out by sessional workers although these workers are supported by permanent staff. A senior worker has responsibility for the quality of assessments and addresses any shortfalls in assessments before they are produced at panel. Effective administrative systems are in place and action is being taken to introduce new computerised systems for the maintenance of records. There are up to date policies and procedures for staff. Workload management is overseen by the manager to ensure they do not exceed their allocated caseload as well as complete other tasks. Link workers develop good relationship with other key agencies working with children. Some concern raised about the lack of input from some placing social workers that has led to link worker extending their roles to meet the needs of children. There are currently adequate numbers of suitably qualified staff to ensure that foster carers are supported by day and through the on-call service at evenings and weekends. Foster carers understand the range of support available to them and use it effectively and appropriately. The quality of administration backup in the agency is good. All foster carers have an allocated link worker. Good support and supervision practices are taking place which ensures that children's care remains appropriate and is constantly reviewed and evaluated. Formal supervision sessions take place on a regular basis and carers feel well supported which in turn enables them to effectively support the child who is placed with them. The service provides practical support to foster carers through the support workers and the health advisor is supportive by ensuring the carers remain healthy and are well trained. Samples of children's records confirm they are well maintained and contain all the necessary information. Information in files are up to date. Staff supervision is used to monitor case files and address any shortfalls. A computerised system is being introduced for the maintenance of children's records and assist with storage difficulties. Carers have received training in record keeping and demonstrate a clear understanding of their responsibilities and ensure they are kept confidential. Good systems in place for the maintaining records for staff, children and carers. All records are kept securely in lockable cabinets. Records of complaints and allegations of abuse are adequately maintained and include action taken to resolve concerns.

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 signed medical consent forms are in place for all children and young people and copies provided with copies. National Minimum Standards, NMS 12.3
- ensure all gaps in employment history are accounted for. NMS 15.3
- create strategies to promote and encourage consultation with children of different ages to share their views and experience about various aspects of the service. NMS 11.3
- ensure pathway plans are in place for all young people preparing for independent living. NMS 14.5
- ensure that monitoring systems for the service adopt a proactive approach to follow up missing Looked After Children information. NMS 4.1.

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.