

Freedom Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jacqueline Dunster
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Date of last inspection	1 May 2007

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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

Freedom Fostering is a limited company operating as an independent fostering agency. It was established in 2002 by a group of social workers, foster carers and teachers who sought to develop a service for children based on principles of high quality foster care and effective support systems. The agency was registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on 18 December 2003. Freedom Fostering's Statement of Purpose indicates that they aim to provide a child centred approach to fostering which is offered in a professional and ethical manner and is compliant with the regulatory frameworks for fostering. Freedom Fostering offers short term, long term and respite placements. The agency also seeks to provide placements for mothers and babies, unaccompanied minors and sibling groups. Foster placements are supported by supervising social workers, support staff and a qualified teacher. It is the declared intention of Freedom Fostering to maintain a small, skilled foster carer group. At the time of the inspection Freedom Fostering supported 10 fostering households with 14 children and young people in placement.

Summary

A key inspection of Freedom Fostering was carried out in May 2007. The agency was judged to be satisfactory overall with good outcomes in helping children and young people to be healthy, to enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and in organisation. The key inspection did not include a full inspection of the fostering panel. This random inspection addresses National Minimum Standard 30. This standard addresses the role and functions of the fostering panel. It is a key standard relating to helping children and young people to remain safe. The inspection also comments on National Minimum Standard 17 where it is relevant to the fostering panel. Following this inspection the agency is judged to continue to have satisfactory outcomes in keeping children and young people safe from harm.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The inspection addresses areas of practice which were not inspected at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Since the key inspection in May 2007 Freedom Fostering has re-established its own fostering panel. This followed a brief attempt to operate a joint fostering panel with another independent fostering agency. The new fostering panel is, therefore, still at the early stages of operation. It has managed to make significant steps towards operating as an effective, robust gatekeeper of assessments on applicants to foster. There remain a number of areas in which the panel needs to improve in order to meet all the requirements of the fostering regulations. The chair of panel, the panel adviser and the responsible individual demonstrate understanding of the areas for development and a commitment to achieve the changes necessary. The panel membership is drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds and professional expertise. It benefits

from the inclusion of someone who has previously been fostered, a foster carer from another fostering provider and a chair of panel with a significant background in children and families work. The fostering panel does not include independent members with a background in child health or education. Although the panel does have access to the advice of a medical practitioner and the registered manager carries a particular interest in education, the panel is not benefiting from the influence, knowledge and expertise of those working in these key partner agencies. The chair of panel has high expectations of the commitment panel members should make to preparing for, and participating in, panel. Members read papers and prepare questions before the panel meets. They participate in training relevant to their role and to their understanding of the work of Freedom Fostering. The panel chair undertakes external training in chairing a fostering panel. These practices ensure that the members of fostering panel have a good understanding of their role and are adequately prepared to carry out the business of panel effectively. The agency subjects panel members to the same vetting requirements as all other staff to ensure they are suitable to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. The checks are almost entirely complete and accurate. However, the agency has relied on a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check for one panel member which has been generated by the local authority who employs them. The agency understands that the person should undertake no further work until it has received its own CRB check. The assessment presented was satisfactory although, at times, errors in grammar and syntax led to confusion. The panel were rigorous in addressing most of the shortfalls in the assessment and exploring these appropriately with the assessor and the applicant. The report provided a comprehensive assessment of the applicant's learning needs. The panel members provide verbal and written feedback to the agency on the quality of assessments. This enables the agency to develop an overview of areas of weakness. The fostering panel ensures that issues raised are dealt with at subsequent panels and that the outcomes are recorded. The panel did not address issues raised in the documentation relating to matters of health. These issues had not been directly addressed by the assessor in their report. This missed the opportunity to explore how the foster carer's health and lifestyle could impact on children or young people placed. The panel took considerable time to reach an informed decision about the appropriateness of terms of approval. However, the assessment had not indicated the proposals about the terms and conditions of any approval with clarity. This hindered the efficiency of the panel's deliberations. The panel did not record the reasons for its recommendation. This could hinder the agency decision maker in making the final decision on the suitability of an applicant to become a foster carer. The panel chair demonstrates good understanding of issues of diversity. Their expectation is that the abilities of potential foster carers to understand these issues is robustly tested. The panel expects evidence to be produced of the potential foster carer's capacity to understand complex issues of identity and discrimination. The fostering panel is sufficiently well-organised to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overall objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care. The shortfalls outlined could compromise the security of decision-making if they are not addressed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is not judged.

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
30	ensure that written reports on the suitability of applicants to be foster carers include the fostering service provider's proposals about the terms and conditions of any approval (Regulation 27)	29 February 2008
15	ensure that the agency acquires their own Criminal Records Bureau checks for all staff, with particular reference to the member of fostering panel whose check has been carried from the local authority with which they are employed (Regulation 20, Schedule 1)	29 February 2008
30	ensure that the fostering panel makes a written record of the reasons for its recommendations (Regulation 25).	29 February 2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure that in assessing the qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering of applicants, the assessment reports and fostering panel deliberations give due weight to the discussion of health, with particular reference to alcohol consumption and smoking (National Minimum Standard 17.7)
- ensure that the independent members of the fostering panel include, as far as possible, expertise in education and child health (National Minimum Standard 30.8).

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.