

Diverse Care (UK) Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jill Marriott
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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

Diverse Care (UK) Limited is a small independent fostering agency, first registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection in December 2004. Its offices are based within the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The primary role of the agency is to recruit, train and support foster carers from within and around the London area to provide suitable placements for children and young people who for many reasons cannot live with their own families. The agency provides a diverse group of carers to ensure appropriate matches can be made for children needing foster placements. There is a small staff group consisting of a manager, two full time supervising social workers a development officer and sessional workers who provide support to families when required. The agency regularly organises outings and social activities for children in placement, foster carers and their families.

Summary

This was an announced, lighter touch inspection, focussing on the key fostering standards. The inspection found that the agency continues to provide good support to foster cares and young people placed with them. Overall Diverse Care Ltd is judged to be a good service. The agency has developed and implemented sound policies and procedures which have been shared with the staff team and the carers. The recruitment, assessment and support for carers is good and evidence clearly shows that young people are consulted about their care and are encouraged and supported where appropriate to keep in contact with family and friends. Staff are committed to providing well matched placements, which meet all of the needs of the young people. The staff group has changed quite regularly over the past twelve months and the majority of the social work team including the manager are comparatively new in post. Foster carers are clear that in spite of the staff changes they have received consistently good support services from the agency. Of the two requirements made at the last inspection one has been met and the other requiring the manager to be registered is going through the appropriate process at present. Of the recommendations made one is still outstanding and has been repeated in this report. A further two requirement and three recommendation have been made at 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

Diverse Care Ltd have since the last inspection recruited permanently to the manager's post and the two vacant social work posts ensuring that staffing levels are appropriate. In spite of the difficulties experienced over the last year in relation to staff retention it is clear that the agency has remained committed to providing good support services for carers and young people. Foster carers spoke very positively about the agency and the support they receive. The statement of purpose and the children's guide to service has been reviewed. There are now two separate and appropriate versions of the children's guide to service in place one for older and one for younger children. The agency has offered all of the foster carers the opportunity to undertake the National Vocational Qualification in child care award (NVQ) level 3. At present 21 carers are studying for the award.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Diverse Care UK have appropriate policies and procedures in place related to the health needs of young people, these documents are included in the foster carers handbook. Initial training for foster carers includes basic health, hygiene, first aid and communicable diseases. Information given to carers at the beginning of their fostering careers includes guidance on health promotion and healthy eating. Although policies and procedures are appropriate some of the more general information in the foster carers' handbook related to health issues is out of date and needs to be reviewed. Carers confirmed that they receive training and support from the agency to promote healthy lifestyles for young people. They are also aware of and understand their role with regard to the health needs of young people living with them. Foster carers actively support children to attend medical appointments and register with the local doctor (GP), dentist and optician. At the point of each placement referral the agency gathers as much information as possible about the child's health and this is shared with the prospective carer. Where an emergency placement is made information is gathered and given to the carer as soon as possible following the start of the placement. Records show that some young people placed by the agency are receiving support from various health professionals including mental health services such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The "Looked after Children" reviews seen on children's files include evidence to show the health of young people is monitored through the review process.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

It was clear from the agencies policies and procedures and from the records examined during the inspection that all required checks have been carried out prior to the recruitment of the management team, the staff team and the foster carers. Members of staff confirmed that the agency has an induction and probationary procedure in place. The agency has over the past twelve months had some difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified social work staff. The manager of the service and the social work team are all newly appointed. Records show they have the qualifications, skills and experience for the posts they hold. The manager has applied to Ofsted for registration. Throughout the inspection process the responsible individual and the manager were able to demonstrate their suitability to run the agency. Following prospective carers applying to foster an initial visit is made to them, to ensure in the first instance the suitability of their home for the fostering task. If the visit is successful the carer will be invited to attend initial training to find out more about fostering. A rigorous training and assessment process follows. Once the assessment, training and statutory checks are completed the application goes to the foster panel who will make a recommendation to the agency decision maker regarding approval. No children are placed with carers until the process is complete and carers are approved to foster. Children are matched appropriately with carers, the agency rarely makes trans-racial or trans-cultural placements unless it is clear that the child's needs can be met by an identified carer. The racial, cultural, gender, religious, disability and language needs of each child is considered at the start of each placement and reviewed at each carers supervision meeting. Each child's placement is reviewed six monthly at the statutory child care review meeting held by the relevant local authority. Where appropriate children are invited to the review and have the opportunity to give their opinion about the placement. The agency has policies and procedures in place to ensure safe care and the protection of looked after children. These policies and procedures are included in the foster carers' handbook. Safe care is covered in the 'skills to foster training' and carers receive training and support with regard to dealing with bullying, difficult behaviour, children missing from care, working with children who have been abused and health and safety issues. The agency's training plan for 2008 also includes

first aid training, diversity issues, child protection and safe care. Carers confirmed that they are aware of the agency's corporal punishment policy and understand that corporal punishment is not acceptable under any circumstances. Information regarding new legislation was available for carers at the most recent carers group attended by the inspector. Carers are fully informed about the needs of children placed with them. They are visited regularly every four to six weeks by the supervising social worker who also maintains weekly phone contact. The agency provides a 24 hour on call service, which carers confirmed is very useful. Unannounced visits to foster carers homes take place at least once in each year. Records of accidents, incidents, allegations and complaints were seen and are in general dealt with according to the agency's policies and procedures. The inspector noted that one issue although dealt with appropriately and recorded on the file was not recorded in the complaints book with the actions taken and the outcome. This indicates that not all members of staff understand the process for dealing with and recording complaints. The recruitment process is the same for the foster panel as it is for all staff. Recruitment details were seen during the inspection and included appropriate references, Criminal Records Bureau disclosures (CRB) and Protection of Children Act (POCA) checks. The foster panel is well balanced in terms of ethnicity and gender and has a good mix of experienced members including foster carers, independent members, education and health representatives. It is clear from observation that not all panel members are involved in case discussion but everyone is involved in the decision making process. The panel tasks include recommendation of approval, re-approval and deregistration of foster carers. The panel also considers complaints where necessary and has a quality assurance role regarding the assessments and reports received.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency has an appropriate equal opportunities policy in place. The staff of the agency have the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to work with young people from a range of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Care plans and regular child care reviews monitor the care of each child placed and ensure that their needs are fully met. Foster carers confirmed that they have received training and are aware of the need to empower children and help them to build their self-confidence. Records show that foster carers encourage young people to attend after school clubs such as swimming, football, brownies, cubs, dance and drama. Children said they also go to the cinema, bowling and on holiday. The agency holds a family fun day which is well attended by children and carers. The agency has an education policy in place which carers are aware of and adhere to. Children's files examined during the inspection included information regarding education. Most children placed by the agency are in school. Some older young people are attending access to work courses and some are in part-time further education. Personal education plans (PEPS) were seen on children's files. Carers are aware of their role and understand that they attend meetings and open evenings with regard to each child placed with them. Carers confirmed that they are aware of the need to encourage homework and be fully involved with the children and their schooling. The agency has limited provision for respite and short break care. Where arrangements are made for these services the foster carer is fully aware that the parent remains responsible for the child.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency has a policy related to contact, which is shared with all carers. Placement plans for young people set out how the agency will meet their assessed needs. Where appropriate children

are supported to maintain contact with family and friends. Young people confirmed that they understood the contact arrangements in place for them. Carers are given training and support to enable them to understand the impact that contact may have on children and young people. Information relating to contact arrangements is also available in the carers' handbook. The agency promotes consultation with young people and values feedback from them. Supervising social workers meet with children regularly to discuss placement issues and they are aware that they can contact the agency or use the complaints procedure if necessary. Children all have a statutory review meeting every six months and are consulted about their placement as part of the process. Where appropriate children are encouraged to contribute to the review of approval for their foster carer. The foster carers' handbook and the children's guide to service include appropriate information regarding how to raise concerns and make complaints if necessary. The inspector noted that one issue although dealt with appropriately and recorded on the file was not recorded in the complaints book with the actions taken and the outcome.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people placed with the agency are encouraged to be involved in planning for their future. Supervising social workers meet with them during home visits and talk through care plans and pathway plans where appropriate. Carers confirmed that they introduce age and ability appropriate independence skills training from the start of each placement. Older young people look at issues such as budgeting, cooking, keeping safe and health and hygiene. Younger children concentrate on healthy eating putting things away and keeping their rooms tidy. Agreed allowances and expenses are paid for each child and information regarding payments is available in the fostering handbook. There is some confusion amongst carers related to children's savings accounts. Carers said that they do save for young people and details of savings are recorded at supervision visits. However, they thought that the agency also held a savings account but they were not clear about this. Further discussion with management concluded that the agency plans to implement a new policy, currently being developed, regarding savings for young people.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has an up to date statement of purpose and an appropriate children's guide to service. Despite difficulties with the retention of staff over the last 12 months carers reported that they have been well supported. They did feel that it has become unclear as to who they should approach when they are in need of help and advice. Carers are clear that they are given details of the out of hours service and there is always someone at the end of a phone to offer support. However some carers said they would go straight to the director if they needed advice. The agency has written procedures in place related to the staffing structure and who to contact in an emergency. However, in-spite of the clear written lines of accountability the roles of each of the service directors are not understood by all members of staff and carers. There are two qualified social workers now in post who undertake the support work with the foster carers. Both members of staff have been recently appointed and are just completing the induction process. They clearly understand the policies and procedures in place and their own roles within the organisation. At present two qualified social workers are able to meet the needs of the foster carers registered with the agency, if more carers are recruited the agency will review the situation to ensure the staffing levels remain appropriate. Carers confirmed that they are well

supported by their supervising social workers who attend child care reviews, health and education meetings with them and visit the family home every four to six weeks. Social workers are also contactable by phone at any time. There is a clear policy regarding records and information to be kept in children's files. Children's records are clearly indexed and appropriate information is recorded. Front sheets include information regarding the child and the professionals working with them. Up to date child care review minutes were seen on the files examined and carers complete and keep their own daily records and records with regard to the health and education of each child placed with them. Administrative records are in good order and these are reviewed and updated yearly. The premises used for the fostering service are suitable for purpose and comprise of office space and space for meetings, contact visits and training, there is identified lockable space available for confidential files and records.

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
11	ensure that all complaints are written in the complaints book with the actions taken and the outcome recorded. Standard 11. Regulation 18(5)	28 March 2008
16	ensure that foster carers are aware of the lines of accountability within the agency. Ensure that all carers are aware of who to contact for support during each 24 hour period. Standard 16(2). Regulation 17(1)	28 March 2008

Recommendations

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

- update health information recorded in the foster carers handbook. This recommendation is repeated. NMS 12.
- create an appropriate policy to ensure that foster carers are aware of their role and responsibility in relation to children's savings. NMS 29.
- ensure that all members of the foster panel are aware of the importance of their role with regard to, their involvement in panel discussion and the decision making process. NMS 30.

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.