

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC358723
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Inspector	Stephen Smith
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	The Beehive McMullen Road Darlington DL1 1RW
Telephone number	01325 387780
Email	nefc@swiis.com
Registered person	SWIIS Foster Care Ltd
Registered manager	Marie-Rose Gregg
Responsible individual	Gurdev Singh Dadral
Date of last inspection	31 August 2007

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd is an independent fostering agency based in a business park on the outskirts of Darlington. It was registered on 31/08/07 but had operated as part of SWIIS's Newcastle branch before that time. The agency provides long and short term foster care for children aged from birth to 18 years of age. Currently around 40 children are placed with 34 foster caring families. In addition to the manager the agency's staff team comprises a senior social worker, two supervising social workers and a social work assistant. The agency also employs three education staff, a health adviser and an office administrator.

Summary

This was an announced inspection of the fostering agency. The purpose of the inspection was to assess how the agency complies with all the key National Minimum Standards. The service is outstanding at providing children with foster carers who are well matched to their needs. It plans placements carefully and makes sure that full written information is given to foster carers, and that effective information sharing takes place at placement agreement meetings. Children's safety and wellbeing is promoted by very effective health and safety and safe caring assessments. Foster carers are well managed and trained to care for children safely. Monitoring of the operation of the agency and significant events is rigorous. The agency ensures that each child's individual needs are clearly identified and well supported. The agency's extremely strong focus on education provides children with excellent support, either individually with their work or in the development of suitable educational plans for them. The service consults with children very well and ensures that they are able to express their views about their care and their foster carers. The agency is good at working with carers to meet children's health needs. Foster carers all receive first aid training and the agency employs a health adviser to work directly with children, support carers and liaise with health professionals. The agency is robust in the way it recruits and assesses prospective foster carers. Carers receive extremely high levels of support, supervision and management from the agency and it provides them with very good, relevant training. The agency works very closely with children's placing local authorities and communication between all parties is strong. Detailed information is retained about children to help ensure that their needs are properly met.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the fostering agency since its registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency effectively provides children and young people with very good health care and support. The agency considers children's health needs as part of its process for matching children with foster carers. It makes sure that foster carers get detailed health information when placements are made, and makes sure that all professionals involved are informed when children's health needs change. The agency ensures that fostered children are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians. Foster carers and professionals help children to attend any appointments necessary. Specialist support for children in areas such as psychology and

psychiatry is available. The agency's health adviser carries out direct work with foster carers and children. For example, individual work has been undertaken with fostered children to help them maintain their sexual health and to support their mental health. The health adviser also liaises with placing authorities' Looked After Children (LAC) nurses, to ensure that children's health assessment take place promptly and support is provided where needed. For example, one child's social worker said, 'The agency provides very good support to help young people access medical and health input.' The health adviser also helps the agency provide specialist advice and training to carers about health issues and disability matters, where necessary, to help ensure that carers are able to meet children's needs. The arrangements regarding who has the authorisation to give consent for children's medical treatment are identified and made clear to foster carers. The agency has recently further strengthened their procedures in this area, to make them even more effective in ensuring that detailed consent arrangements are identified and agreed. The agency works with local authorities to ensure that children's annual LAC medical checks take place. The health adviser regularly monitors children's health between these reviews, and helps draw up 'Health Passports' for children. Foster carers are provided with a range of good training to help them meet children's health needs. Issues covered in training include, first aid, mental health, drug awareness, passive smoking, sexual health, and traumatic stress disorder.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency makes sure that foster carers' homes are suitable and safe places for children to live. It carries out rigorous health and safety checks and risk assessments of carers' homes and cars when they are assessed these are updated regularly. The agency uses a very effective dog safety assessment. Carers receive health and safety information in the handbook provided to them. The agency is outstanding in the way it arranges foster placements for children which are carefully matched to their needs. Placements are carefully planned and even short notice or same day placements are made only after careful sharing of information and risk assessment. The agency makes sure that it gets full documentation about children, and ensures that this information is passed onto carers to help them consider whether a placement is suitable. The agency is robust in ensuring that placement agreement meetings take place. It uses its own detailed form to record the information shared and agreements made during these meetings. Where documentation provided by the local authority does not contain sufficiently detailed information about children, the agency works hard to seek additional information to pass on to carers. The agency is also excellent at working to keep fostered children safe. It carries out rigorous assessments and checks of new foster carers. The agency supports carers to develop detailed safe caring policies and safe placement risk assessments that are agreed with children's placing social workers. It provides foster carers with excellent support and management to make sure they care for children properly. Carers receive training in child protection, behaviour management and bullying, and the agency keeps the appropriateness of this training under review. The manager has a very effective system for recording and monitoring any complaints, incidents or allegations made about carers, which the agency takes appropriate action to respond to these. This monitoring is undertaken monthly and an annual summary produced. Records of significant events are also maintained and monitored by a critical incidents panel of senior staff, who consider any actions needed as a result of an incident. Children feel safe and well cared for in their placements, and know how to make a complaint and who to speak to if they have a problem. For example one young person said, 'I know I am safe with my foster carers and also SWIIS are a good foster carer service.' The agency operates a careful and robust

recruitment procedure to make sure that applicants are qualified, experienced and suitable people to work with children. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on staff and foster carers are updated every three years. The fostering agency has an effective panel in operation. This panel is correctly constituted with members with suitable backgrounds. Since the agency has separated from the organisation's Newcastle branch panel has become a joint panel with an additional social worker appointed to it. Panel gives very careful consideration to the matters presented to it and makes clear and specific recommendations to the agency's decision maker. Minutes of meetings are detailed and comprehensive and provide clear records of the panel's discussion and recommendation made. Panel will not consider items of business unless all the necessary information and supporting documentation is present and feeds back any issues of quality to the fostering agency.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Although most of SWIIS's foster carers and the children they foster are from white backgrounds. The service provides foster carers with good information and support to promote equality and diversity. The agency recruits foster carers from a diverse range of backgrounds, and diversity is considered as part of foster carers' assessments and covered in preparation to fostering training. Information is included within the foster carer handbook and training is provided in topics including valuing diversity, cultural diversity and equality and gay advice. The agency prioritises children's individual needs when matching them with carers. Foster carers are given as much information as possible to help them care for children with sensitivity for their individual needs and backgrounds. Individual training is available for carers based on children's specific needs and good training is available for carers working with children with disabilities. For example, foster carers have undertaken training in 'peg feeding' and 'the dignity of risk'. Foster carers are provided with any specialist equipment needed by children. The agency's health adviser provides excellent support in this area. The agency's support to fostered children with their education is outstanding. The service's education case workers are qualified teachers and help children achieve with their education. They liaise with educational and other professionals to ensure that children's education is promoted. They also undertake direct work with children both in and out of school. Work is undertaken to help children with homework, or to prepare for exams. Children are supported to help them cope in the school environment or to undertake more appropriate education routes. For example a foster carer said, 'The educational worker has worked really hard along with ourselves and the school to help our foster child to settle at school and to, eventually, obtain a statement of special educational needs.' Education case workers ensure that education plans for children are up-to-date and appropriate and monitor children's school attendance closely. They provide support and education activities when children are not attending school. Children's files contain particularly good and detailed information about their educational achievement and the support provided to them. Applicants to foster have their attitudes and ability to promote children's education considered as part of their assessment. The agency provides carers with ongoing training and support in this area, including topics regarding 'education and the looked after child' and the work of the Connexions service. Children's educational arrangements and needs are considered as part of the matching process. For example, a key matching component of one placement was the ability for a young person to continue to attend the same college.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency works hard to promote children's contact with their families where this is appropriate. The agency's careful matching process takes contact arrangements and plans into consideration when children are placed with foster carers. The agency uses its own foster placement agreement record, and ensures that detailed information about contact arrangements is sought at the beginning of placements with clear arrangements made regarding who is to be responsible for implementing these. Children's files contain very clear information about any arrangements for contact and any legal basis for the arrangements. The agency makes the importance of positive contact with family and friends clear to carers. It supports carers to manage contact arrangements and to deal with any difficulties arising from them. Children receive good support to have contact with their families wherever this is appropriate. Foster carers facilitate contact where necessary. The agency helps its foster carers to support children to have good networks with friends and within the wider community. The agency and its carers provide support for children to make and keep friends and to take part in activities in the community. For example one young person said, 'I have friends who come to visit and I go to their house.' Foster carers maintain comprehensive records of children's progress, including any contact arrangements, which are monitored by their supervising social worker. The agency provides placing social workers with written monthly updates of the child's progress based on these records. Information within these updates relating to children's contact with their families is used to help develop and review children's plans. The agency places great emphasis on seeking children's views about their care. It works hard to consult with children about the care they receive and wider aspects agency's work. Children feel listened to by their carers and have a say about their day to day lives. For example one young person said, 'They go along with the options I choose but also give me advice on all the other options available.' Another said, 'My carers always listen to what I say and let me choose, like food and what we do. They ask me about holidays.' The agency ensures that children's views are taken into account regarding their care needs. For example, the agency worked with the placing authority to provide care for one young person based upon his own assessment of his health needs. Agency staff know fostered children well and meet with them regularly, either individually or in groups. Consultation with children takes place at these meetings and their views are recorded. The agency keeps a record, monitored by the manager, of children's comments from this consultation which is used for planning purposes. Children receive individual support to contribute to their care plan reviews. For example one young person said, 'I'm being cared for in the right way. I say what I think in reviews.' Children's opinions also form a key part of their foster carers' annual reviews. Children know how to complain and who to speak to if they have a problem. The agency provides children with a young person's guide telling them about being fostered. Activities for children and carers take place and the agency is developing groups for fostered children to take part in after identifying, through consultation, that there was a demand for these from some children. A foster carer said, 'The young person is given plenty of opportunity to put forward her views on her day-to-day life.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering agency has a Statement of Purpose in place that is given to foster carers which has recently been fully updated. Children are given a young person's guide to the agency. The pack containing this contains a form and prepaid envelope allowing young people to contact

the manager confidentially and directly if they have any concerns. Effective staff supervision and appraisal systems are in operation and the manager, social work, education and health staff are able to access the training they require. Workload is carefully managed within the team to ensure that staff are able to provide a good service to children and foster carers. The staff team is very effectively managed and the agency has very good links and working arrangements with the local authorities that place children with it. Children benefit from excellent joint planning when placements are made, in their reviews and ongoing basis. Joint visits to foster carers and children by supervising social workers and placing social workers take place as appropriate. These good working relationships help promote very good outcomes for children. The agency is very careful and thorough in the way it assesses prospective foster carers. It carries out checks on applicants' suitability with CRB, local authority, children's schools, birth children, previous partners, employers, and other referees. Once approved these checks are repeated on a regular basis. Applicants are visited frequently as part of the assessment process and their suitability is considered further during their preparation training. Referees are visited as part of the process of checking on applicants' suitability. Detailed records are made of these visits and referees are asked to check these records to ensure they are accurate. Assessments include input from the agency's education workers to consider applicants' ability to promote children's education. Assessment quality is monitored by the manager and a second social worker visit, made to applicants, is included in the assessment taken to panel. Foster carers for the agency receive very good support and management. For example one foster carer said, 'The support we receive from all SWIIS workers couldn't be better. There's always someone available 24-7 no matter if it's a huge problem or whether we just want to talk. Everyone works together.' Foster carers are visited very frequently with formal supervision taking place on a monthly basis. However, arrangements are flexible, and many carers receive supervision more frequently than this if requested or needed. For example, one carer reported receiving supervision on a weekly basis for a year during a difficult placement. Education case workers, the social work assistant and the health adviser also visit placements regularly to work with carers or young people. Supervising social workers meet with children in placement regularly. The agency operates an effective 'out of hours' support service. Some excellent examples of individual support for young people and carers have occurred that were well above what could be expected of the service. One foster carer described overall support as 'outstanding' and out of hours support as 'awesome'. The agency runs monthly foster carer support groups that include a training element. Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place appropriately frequently. The agency is very thorough and efficient in the way it manages foster carers' reviews. Reviews take place within their set timescales and provide a detailed consideration of carers' continued suitability to foster children. Reviews monitor the appropriateness of foster carers' terms of approval and ensure that any changes are made correctly. They consider how well carers continue to carry out the fostering role and meet children's needs. As part of the preparation for foster carers' reviews the agency seeks the views of the fostered children and their social workers, the foster carers and the carers' own children, if any. Foster carers' reviews are presented to the agency's fostering panel for consideration before being agreed by the decision maker. The robust nature of this review process helps to safeguard children. The service provides foster carers with a good range of training. It offers 'mandatory' training in topics such as first aid, safe caring and child protection, bullying and behaviour management. The agency operates induction and foundation training programmes for all carers. It also provides training based on carers' wishes or needs identified by the service, in formal training sessions or from speakers attending foster carer support groups. For example, recent training has included, providing permanence, the work of Connexions, attachment, direct work with young people, and the

work of the Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling Service. Foster carers' training needs are discussed in their supervision and review meetings. The opportunity for foster carers to undertake National Vocational Qualification level 3 training in child care is provided. The agency makes sure that it gets full and up-to-date information regarding the children placed and liaises effectively with local authorities to gain information it needs about children. Foster carers have full information about the children they care for and children's files contain all the necessary documentation. The agency's carers maintain good records about the day-to-day care provided to children, and the agency provides very comprehensive monthly summaries to placing social workers. The excellent work in this area helps support the very good care provided to children. The agency has very effective administrative systems that ensure that records of foster carers, children and miscellaneous matters are well maintained. Records are in place containing key information relevant to the running of the service. The agency's system for monitoring the significant events set out in the regulations is very effective.

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
-----------------	---------------	-----------------

Recommendations

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

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.