

Faith Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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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

Faith Foster Care is a private limited company incorporated in August 2007. The fostering agency is located in a business centre in Forest Gate, within the London Borough of Newham. Foster placement opportunities range from respite care to long-term placements. The fostering manager is an experienced child care social worker and the responsible individual is a management consultant with diverse community work experience. The registered manager position is currently vacant.

Summary

The inspection of Faith Foster Care is the first since its registration with Ofsted in February 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to assess the service against key National Minimum Standards and monitor compliance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The inspection process was conducted over five days; its scope was wide ranging. Overall Faith Foster Care is judged to be an inadequate service. The fostering service has made a promising start in some areas of its functioning, for example appropriate policies and procedures in place and the agency supports the placement of children and young people and approved foster carers very well. The service has appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place and pays good attention to key placement issues such as matching, consultation, equality and diversity issues, contact arrangements and young people's education and health needs. However, significant deficiencies are noted in the key individual outcome areas of staying safe and organisation. In line with Ofsted's bench marking guidance these weaknesses in the functioning of the service have significant impact on the services overall quality rating. Issues identified for improvement include the robust vetting of prospective foster carers and their support network, fully documented records of all allegations made against foster carers and consistent notification to Ofsted of these allegations. Form F assessments require greater detail and co-ordination of information and the service's foster care panel must rigorously scrutinise presented Form F assessments. Panel minutes must be an accurate reflection of panel discussion and recommendations. Key documentation, including panel minutes and individual foster care agreements must explicitly highlight the conditions of foster carers' approval. Safe caring policies are not evident for individual foster care households and comprehensive health and safety assessments are not completed prior to presentation at panel as part of the foster care approval process. The service's practice manager currently does not have access to regular clinical supervision to address practice issues; the registered manager position is currently vacant.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of Faith Foster Care since its registration with Ofsted in February 2008.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes well the health and development of children and young people in placement. Staff of the fostering service and foster carers' confirm that preparatory training

for prospective foster carers include information about meeting the health care needs of young people in placement. The foster carer handbook includes written guidance about a range of health care issues. Files evidence the good efforts of the service to ensure that children and young people are registered with key health care services such as GP services, opticians and dental care soon after placement start. Foster carers confirm that they receive fair information about children's health issues from the placing authority prior to or just after the placement is negotiated. Children's files have a dedicated health care section and health matters are routinely explored during supervisory visits. Foster carers and children in placement confirm that health care appointments are routinely scheduled and attended. Files evidence that children also attend statutory medical assessments and there are good records of children's individual immunizations histories. Where specialised input is required, effort is made to ensure that necessary services are readily accessed. So for example, foster carers have access to specialist nutritional services in order to address children's healthy eating and weight management. In addition, where there are identified medical conditions, foster carers are given support and guidance to help young people manage required medical regimes such as physiotherapy and the administration of medication. The service maintains centralised records of all accidents that occur to children in placement and foster carers keep records of all significant events. The fostering service has good access to medical advice as two GP's are members of on the service's fostering panel; the manager of the service is a trained counsellor and the supervising social worker has a joint specialist degree in social work and learning disability nursing. Children indicate that they enjoy meals prepared in placement; foster carers make good efforts to ensure cultural and religious needs and preferred tastes are taken into consideration when meal planning. So for example Halal prepared meats are routinely offered to children in placement who are of the Muslim faith.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Staff of the fostering service are appropriately qualified and experienced to conduct their specific duties. The registered individual has extensive experience and formal qualification in management, while the practice manager is a qualified social worker with extensive experience of child care within a local authority setting. She is also a trained counsellor. The supervising social worker is a qualified social worker and holds a joint specialist degree in social work and learning disability nursing. Staff personnel files evidence that all necessary staff vetting checks are complete. There are written procedures in place that address the recruitment of staff to work within the fostering service. The agency has procedures in place that outline recruitment practices for foster carers. Files evidence staff respond promptly to enquiries from the public, foster carer application forms are complete and that staff conduct initial home visits of potential foster carers. Foster carers' homes are comfortable, welcoming, well furnished and appropriate to meeting the needs of children in placement. Children comment that they enjoy their homes, feel comfortable and have access to all necessary equipment and materials such as books, toys, quiet area to complete homework and private space. Preparatory foster care training features information on health and safety. Files indicate however, that comprehensive health and safety checks on foster carers' accommodation are not completed prior to applicants being presented at the agency's foster care panel as required. Staff of the service comment that health and safety checks were completed by the previous registered manager, however, documentation to confirm this was not produced. The fostering service has a comprehensive written policy that outlines the service's process of matching Looked After Children with foster carers who are suitable to meeting their identified needs. Factors for matching consideration include issues

of contact, education, race, culture and language, religion, disability and safe caring. Files evidence that staff of the fostering service comply well with the written policy in their decision making with regards to the matching process. At the time of the inspection, all four of the service's approved foster carers and children in placement were of the Islam faith. Where other matching considerations were not exact, for example the children's ethnicity and culture differed from that of their carers, it was clear that additional support was offered by the staff. So, for example, foster carers are supported in providing children's preferred food and appropriate hair and skin care regimes. Staff comment and foster carers confirm that the service's foster care preparatory training includes a focus on child protection and safeguarding children and young people in placement. The service is in the process of implementing a training programme for foster carers, which includes training focused on child protection, safe caring and behaviour management. The fostering service has safe caring and child protection policies in place; the latter fails to identify and include details of Ofsted for interested parties to contact if they so wish. The service's safe caring policy is a document that provides general guidance to foster carers about establishing 'house rules' while children and young people are on placement to help keep them safe. However, foster carers, foster carer files and children's files did not evidence actual individual safe guarding 'house rules' as the policy suggests should be in place for each fostering household. With regards to allegations against staff or foster carers, since its registration the service has managed three allegations made by children against their foster carer. The service maintains a central log of allegations made, however the log did not include the details of all allegations. Staff documentation of information relating to some of the allegations was insufficiently detailed, in particular omitting conversation and action taken by the local authority. It is noted that the fostering service has also failed to notify Ofsted of any of the allegations, as required by regulations. The fostering service has clear written procedures available to staff and foster carers that address issues of bullying, behaviour management and the management of children and young people deemed 'missing' from placement. Some of the information is also available to children and young people via written guides specifically tailored for Looked After Children. Some foster carers are working with staff of the service to address ongoing behaviour management issues for sibling groups; files evidence specifically drawn up behavioural plans that outline strategies to counteract presenting issues. This is very good practice. The foster care service has written guidance in place that outlines the membership, purpose, function and arrangements for its foster care panel meetings. Since its registration with Ofsted in February 2008, the service has held only one panel meeting; the inspector reviewed the minutes of this meeting as no foster care panel meeting was observed as part of the inspection process. Members of Faith Foster Care Fostering panel have good experience and qualifications in the recommended fields of expertise for panel members, these including the field of social work, medicine and education. One panel member is an experienced foster carer. Staff of the service are currently attempting to identify a former Looked After Child to also attend panel. As required, two staff members of the agency are panel members; the responsible individual is the agency decision maker. The foster care panel convened earlier this year was quorate and considered amongst other issues, the approval of three prospective foster carers. Minutes taken of the panel meeting are not sufficiently detailed and staff of the service comment that the distributed minutes of the meeting are not an accurate reflection of the discussion and deliberation that took place. Staff also comment that the minutes contain factual inaccuracies, but are unable to account for why the document has been approved and distributed. In reviewing the Form F assessments presented at the foster care panel it is clear that key information, particularly with regard to the robust vetting of the applicants and their support networks is inadequate. The issue of foster carers vetting is further discussed in the 'organisation'

outcome area of this report as the two are intrinsically linked. It is noted that the panel minutes do not highlight that any discussion took place regarding poor vetting practices, although staff in attendance at the panel meeting feel this is not the case and suggest the panel minutes have omitted record of the discussion. It is of concern that despite vital safeguards such as local authority checks, attempts to obtain the views of applicants' previous marital partners and checks with applicants' previous fostering agencies have not been obtained, all applicants were approved as foster carers subject to no conditions of approval. The service's fostering panel has failed to perform a key function in providing the service with a quality assurance system ensuring staff's rigorous assessment of prospective foster carers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Faith Foster Care Service values diversity and consistently demonstrates a commitment to equality and anti-discriminatory practice. There are specific policies in place that address equal opportunities and the valuing of diversity, which support practice within the agency at all levels. Staff of the fostering service is attentive to the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, disability, sexuality, gender and other specific needs of children in placement. Supervisory visits routinely focus on how placements are meeting the holistic needs of children and how foster carers are ensuring that children feel positive about who they are, how they present and self identity issues. The matching process in particular is geared towards ensuring placements address issues of identity thoroughly. The fostering services assessment of prospective foster carers is consistent in exploring issues of diversity and equality; preparatory training also focuses on these issues. The fostering service is mindful of significant cultural and religious events that are of importance to children, young people and foster carers. So for example at the time of the inspection, many of the carers and staff of the service were observing Ramadan; consideration was given to the impact to families of required prayer and fasting. Staff indicate that it is probable that the organisation will host some form of Eid celebration for known families of the Islam faith. With regards to education, the fostering service has well written policies in place that promote the educational achievement of children in placement. Foster carers demonstrate an understanding of the agency's expectation that they support the educational efforts of children in their care. Foster carers comment that they are very involved with the children's education; attending parents' evening, teacher conferences and helping children with their homework. Children confirm this practice. Files evidence good records that outline the educational progress of children in placement; there is a dedicated educational section on each of the children's files containing school report, attendance records and other relevant information. The educational needs of children are routinely explored via supervisory visits and as part of the Looked After Children (LAC) process. Children indicate that they very much enjoy the schools they attend and talk enthusiastically about their favourite subjects. They confirm that they receive assistance with homework from members of their foster family and are appreciative of this input. Foster carers' homes are equipped with key learning materials such as books, toys, educational games and children indicate that trips to the library are frequent. Some foster carers are exploring with the children an indicated desire to resume religious study, which is in line with the children's practising faith. The fostering service does not offer a short break service to families in need.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for children in its care. Staff of the service indicate and foster carers confirm that written guidance is available outlining the importance of children in care maintaining positive relationships with their significant others. Preparatory foster care training explores this issue further. Files evidence the sometimes complicated contact arrangements in place for children in placement to ensure they have adequate contact with their birth families. At the time of the inspection, two foster care placements were accommodating a large sibling group of children. Contact arrangements were intricate in facilitating the children's contact with their parents individually and with each other at specified times, at specified locations. In addition to these arrangements, the fostering service facilitates regular recreational activities for the entire sibling group in order to promote positive interaction between all the siblings. The children indicate that the contact arrangements in place are meeting their needs and that the organised contact activities by the agency are greatly appreciated. Foster carers are encouraged to pay attention to the reaction of the children following contact and to record and report this to staff and representatives of the local authority, particularly as part of the LAC process. Foster carers regularly discuss issues of the children's contact during supervisory visits; this is well documented on file. With regard to consultation, children indicate that their foster carers take a keen interest in their well-being and talk with them to gain their views and opinion on a range of many differing issues. Files evidence that supervising social workers also meet with children in placement on a very regular basis, fortnightly, in private to monitor individual progress. Staff comment that each young person is given an 'emergency card' that has the contact details of staff members of the fostering service for them to contact at any time if they so wish. Files also contain documentary evidence of completed feedback questionnaires to children, asking them to comment on their satisfaction with their placement and the performance of the service. The fostering service supplies children in placement with written guides specifically tailored for children. One is specific to Faith Foster Care, which outlines issues such as contact arrangements, promoting the wishes and feelings of children in care, bullying and the service's safety policy. In addition, two more general, age specific children's guides are available that have been issued by The Fostering Network.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency had facilitated foster care placements for five children and young people; the eldest young person being aged 13 years. As a result there has been little opportunity for the service to evidence systems in place to prepare young people in care for adulthood. However, staff comment that some of the older young people are being supported to become more independent and so, for example travel independently on public transport and are supported by foster carers to save, budget and shop independently. The fostering service pays foster carers an allowance on a weekly basis. There are financial systems in place to ensure that foster carers are paid the correct amount at the expected rate and that other expenses are reimbursed. Foster carers confirm that they receive the expected payment at the appropriate rate on a weekly basis and experience no problems receiving payment from the fostering service.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Faith Foster Care Service has a Statement of Purpose document in place which outlines well the aims and objectives of the service. The document outlines the services and facilities provided

and complies fully with the requirements of the regulations. The fostering service currently makes use three Children's Guides. One is a service specific written guide for young people in placement with Faith Foster Care, the other two children's guide are tailored for different aged children and young people, is more generic in content and is issued by The Fostering Network. Faith Foster Care's 'Child Guide Booklet' outlines a number of key issues but fails to include information about the service's complaints procedure or the contact details of Ofsted. This is required by the regulations. Staff comment that in addition to the written guides, children and young people receive an 'emergency card' that contains information to Looked After Children about making complaints, however this was not produced during the course of the inspection. With regard to ensuring quality assurance, based on discussion with staff members and the review of the service's panel minutes, it is clear that Faith Foster Care's fostering panel have failed to ensure that the quality of information considered at panel is sufficient for well informed decisions to be made about the approval of prospective foster carers. This quality assurance mechanism is a distinct function of the fostering panel. While staff of the service acknowledge this, they comment that the quality of the foster assessments on this occasion is the consequence of the unexpected departure of the previous registered manager who was responsible for the completion of the assessments. These circumstances however, do not account for poor monitoring of work presented at the fostering panel. Faith Foster Care service is the infancy of its development. There is a management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. The service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff. The staff group of the fostering service indicate that they are well supported and supervised and have access to good training opportunities; for example the practice manager is currently participating in a management course. It is noted however that the practice manager does not currently receive regular, formal clinical supervision that addresses social work practice issues. This is essential for the continued effective development of the service. The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers; these are explicitly outlined in a number of written documents, in particular, the Foster Carers' Handbook. Foster carers confirm that the strategy is effective and highlight in particular excellent support and supervision they receive via staff of the agency. Some post-approval training has already been provided and there are plans in place to offer foster carers further training opportunities. Foster carers indicate that information and advice are readily available via staff and that the Foster Carers' Handbook is a useful reference tool. Foster carers confirm that the service's out of hours system is effective and staff are always receptive to their needs and are keen to offer assistance. Foster carers and staff of the service indicate that there is effective communication between the staff group and representatives of the local authority. Foster carers' records are generally well maintained. The exception to this however is records of foster carers' checks and references. The review of three foster carer files reveal that checks from the local authority, and in separate cases, references from the prospective foster carer's current employer and checks with the foster carer's previous foster care agency were all missing. Quality assurance systems are not in place to alert staff to the need to complete these essential vetting checks. Senior staff comment that improvements have been made in the vetting processes of current prospective foster carers, awaiting approval As mentioned elsewhere in this report, staff's recording of the management of allegations against foster carers is in need of improvement to ensure comprehensive records are maintained. The fostering service's current foster care agreement document is not compliant with the regulations as it fails to highlight carers' compliance with the agency's policies and procedures. Furthermore the document does not specify, as required, the terms of the foster carer's approval. This is also noted to be the case on the foster care panel minutes and there was some ambiguity to the exact terms of foster carers' approval as

files were not explicit in establishing the conditions of foster carers' approval. This is unsatisfactory and unhelpful to prospective placing authorities. Children's case files are well maintained by staff of the service and foster carers maintain record logs of all significant events that occur in placement. Files evidence that staff maintain comprehensive case records for children, where information is missing staff make keen efforts to liaise with the placing authority.

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
6	ensure that comprehensive health and safety checks of prospective foster carers' homes are completed prior to applicants presentation at the fostering panel and that this can be evidenced. (Reg. 27)	1 January 2009
9	ensure that the child protection policy is updated to make reference to Ofsted and include its contact details. (Reg. 12)	1 January 2009
9	ensure that individual safe caring guidelines are in place for each foster home (Reg. 11)	1 January 2009
9	ensure that all allegations made against foster carers are reported to Ofsted and that the fostering service maintain comprehensive records of all allegations made. (Reg. 43)	1 January 2009
30	ensure that the minutes of the foster care panel are an accurate reflection of discussions held and are sufficiently detailed (Reg. 25)	1 January 2009
30	ensure that the foster care panel makes recommendations regarding the approval of prospective foster carers based on full and complete information as outlined in Schedule 3 of the regulations (Reg. 27)	1 January 2009
1	ensure that the service's guide for children include information about making complaints and the contact details of Ofsted. (Reg.3)	1 January 2009
4	ensure that the fostering panel monitors and performs effectively its quality assurance role in developing and improving services provided (Reg. 42)	1 January 2009
20	ensure that the practice manager receives clinical supervision by an appropriate social work professional to address practice issues (Reg. 21)	1 December 2008

22	ensure that all foster carers have an up to date foster care agreement which includes all the matters as set out in regulation 28(5)(b) schedule 5	1 January 2009
25	establish and operate a system for monitoring the quality of records, in particular foster carers' vetting checks and take remedial action where appropriate (Reg.11)	1 January 2009

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.