

Fostering Support Group:London Office

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Cheryl Carter / Caroline Wilson
Type of Inspection	Key

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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

Fostering Support Group (FSG) was first established in 1989 and has been providing fostering services in the Kent area. The agency provides emergency, short and long-term foster placements for children of all ages and with a range of care needs. In 2005 Care UK, a national care provider acquired Fostering Support Group. The London branch was registered in February 2009. The branch employs a manager, five social work staff and an administrator. The work of the branch is supported by a range of central and shared resources in the agency. The branch currently supports 38 carer households and 45 children.

Summary

This was an announced inspection. The inspection concentrated on the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that have been identified by Ofsted as most important to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in foster care.

The London branch of Fostering Support group provides and supports foster care placements that offer stable, consistent care to children and young people. Support is offered to carers to make sure children's health care needs are met and healthy styles are promoted. Good attention is paid to all aspects of child protection and safe caring to ensure children are accommodated in stable, safe and well matched placements that meet their needs. Attention is paid to meeting the diverse needs arising from children's differing backgrounds and care needs. Educational stability and progress is supported by the branch and its carers to ensure that children are achieving their educational potential. Arrangements for contact ensure that consistent children maintain links with their family and home communities. Arrangements are in place to help ensure children's views are heard and respected.

Support systems for carers are good and there are opportunities for training and development. The service is well managed to ensure the needs of the children are met consistently. Placements are well supported and there are appropriate levels of monitoring to ensure their suitability.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of this agency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The outcomes for children in this area are good. The agency and its carers ensures the health care needs of children in placement are identified and met. All relevant medical and health information is obtained as part of matching processes before children are placed, so that carers are able to meet the identified needs of the children. The agency endeavours to obtain any shortfalls in information from the placing authority, and ensures that they are clear about areas of responsibility for health care issues between carers, placing authorities and birth families.

The emotional and behavioural profile on each child is assessed at the beginning of the placement. Any behavioural themes and patterns of a child's behaviour as a whole is used not

only to ensure that the needs of the child are being met but this also serves to identify future training and support for carers. As a result foster carers feel supported in caring for the child and the child receive the help and support that they need. This is a crucial service which influences the direction of the services that are offered.

Carers ensure that children are promptly registered with local health services and that current or emerging health care concerns are thoroughly explored and suitable plans for treatment are put in place. Good attention is paid by the agency to the completion of annual health assessments for placed children, which help ensure health care needs are not being overlooked. Children in placement confirm that they are encouraged by their carers through diet and exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Where children require more specialist help and support over mental health issues the agency liaises with placing and local area authorities to obtain these services.

Carers complete detailed individual health records for placed children which ensure a comprehensive history of health concerns and treatments is maintained and can be passed on to subsequent placements if required. The agency, through regular supervisory visits to carers, maintains close monitoring of the adequacy of carers' support for children's health and this is supplemented by the monitoring of any illnesses, accidents or use of medication. Carers are provided with a range of training covering first aid and health and development issues and, where required, more specialist training or support for children who have more complex health care needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency ensures there are good levels of safety and protection offered to children placed in their care. The responsible individual is suitably qualified and the registered agency is run by qualified and experienced directors and managers and no concerns have arisen about their continuing fitness for these roles. There is good attention to ensuring the safety of children placed with its carers. The staff running the service at this branch continue to be fit and appropriate to carry out this role. Other staff working at the branch are suitably qualified and experienced and the service ensures required checks on staff suitability are updated regularly. No concerns have arisen since the last inspection about the suitability or the way in which the agency is run.

The physical safety and appropriateness of carer households is thoroughly assessed when carers are first approved, at subsequent household reviews and through regular unannounced visits by supervising social workers. The agency provides relevant training and guidance for carers to help make sure their households continue to be safe places for children to live.

There is good attention to detail in areas of child protection and the agency makes sure that all households have a clear written and agreed general approach to safe caring, alongside individual safe caring plans for each child placed. This is backed up where necessary, by more specific individual risk assessments where particular welfare concerns are anticipated such as absconding. The agency provides initial and then regular updating training for staff and carers on child protection and safe caring.

When child protection concerns arise the agency follows appropriate procedures to ensure children are kept safe and cooperates fully with any investigations by area children's services

staff. The agency makes appropriate notifications to the relevant external agencies to ensure areas of possible concern can be adequately monitored. Carer files and related documents show good evidence of how concerns are followed up.

The agency has appropriate policies, procedures and guidance in place to manage complaints from all relevant parties. Not all complaints are recorded and a complaint from a child relating to his Christmas present has taken seven months to resolved.

The agency provides carers with clear written guidance on behaviour management techniques and expectations. Training on appropriate management of challenging behaviours is provided as part of pre and post-approval training programmes. The agency also provides access to professional psychology consultation as part of its carer support strategy, to help carers manage behaviours safely and effectively. Supervising social work staff maintain a good oversight of carers' management of behaviour through carer maintained records, regular supervision and monitoring of key events. Carers report very positively on the quality of day to day advice and support from supervising social workers on managing behaviour. The agency provides appropriate guidance for carers on managing unauthorised absences by children and any concerns arising about bullying. Carers carry out this guidance consistently.

The agency carries out all required checks for new staff, for carers and for their support networks and maintains good evidence of this. Good systems are in place to ensure all such checks are regularly updated as required.

The agency's fostering panel is appropriately constituted. The panel membership comes from a range of backgrounds and has suitable levels of experience and knowledge to contribute to panel processes although there could be better representation from minority ethnic communities. Scrutiny of panel minutes and observation of a panel meeting confirms that the panel is well run and undertakes its work thoroughly and conscientiously in seeking to ensure only safe and suitable foster households are approved. Where approval applications are unsatisfactory they are appropriately challenged by the panel. There are excellent systems in place for formal feedback by the panel chair and panel members on all aspects of the running of the panel and their observations on the quality of the agency's work. The panel chairperson and panel members have access to relevant formal training opportunities

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency addresses matters of diversity thoroughly in its assessment processes for new carers and in initial and ongoing training opportunities for carers and staff. Carer feedback indicates they feel the agency is particularly alert to addressing issues of diversity in the process of placement matching and placement support.

The agency avoids transracial placement except where the paramount needs of children dictate otherwise and will provide appropriate guidance and support for carers in such circumstances to ensure children's needs in terms of diversity are met fully. The agency does not provide placements for children with significant levels of disability.

The agency and its carers provides a consistently high level of support for school attendance and educational achievement. Currently all children placed with the agency are in full-time education placements. Carers provide good support and encouragement for educational

achievement as shown in the positive feedback from children in the questionnaires. Carers regularly attend school meetings and work alongside schools and placing authorities to draw up and implement Personal Education Plans (PEPs). The agency attends education related meetings to support carers where required. Good systems are in place within the agency to monitor educational attendance and achievement.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency and its carers are fully aware of the importance of sustaining family links and contact arrangements where this is in the best interests of placed children. Carers' training covers the importance of working with families. Children's records indicate that where formal contact arrangements are in place these are fully supported by the agency. The agency ensures that, unless there is a specific and justifiable need, contact takes place away from carer households to help ensure carer households are protected from the direct impact of contact arrangements.

The agency has a range of appropriate ways of eliciting the views of placed children. Feedback from placed children indicates they feel involved and consulted by their carers over the day to day planning of their care. They can also attend and contribute to their own care reviews and are consulted as part of carer household reviews. The agency runs groups for placed children as both a recreational and consultative exercise. There is the occasional event for the children of foster carers to meet and go out on some fun activities, however there are no formal avenues for these children to express their views on how fostering impacts on their lives. A good range of written information is provided for placed children outlining the expectations that they can have of the agency, alongside contact information for advice and advocacy services.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster Carers have not received training to provide effective support to a young person preparing to move into semi or independent living. Foster carers however have a check list of things to do when a young person is preparing to leave care.

The agency provides carers with good levels of allowances which carers feel are satisfactory to meet the needs of placed children. Regular allowances and other reimbursements are paid to carers promptly and efficiently by the agency. Carers encourage children to develop appropriate savings habits.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a detailed statement of purpose in place that provides a clear picture to prospective carers and placing authorities of the services offered and the way in which the agency is run.

The agency is very well managed with clearly defined areas of managerial and staff responsibility across the different aspects of the agency's operations. Staff are appropriately experienced and qualified for the work they are undertaking. Staffing numbers are satisfactory to support the current functions of the agency and the responsible individual is aware of the need to keep a close eye on staffing numbers as carer numbers, and their geographical spread, increases, so that good levels of support and supervision can be sustained. Staff report they are well supported

by the registered manager with regular access to formal and informal support, regular team meetings and relevant training opportunities.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Foster carers speak highly of the commitment of the fostering service to ensure equality and diversity are considered in all aspects of the work of the service, particularly in the matching process.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that all foster carers have a valid first aid certificate (NMS12)
- ensure that the complaints procedure is updated and all complaints are recorded with actions and outcomes(NMS11)