

Faith Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Address	Suite 6 6th floor City Gate House 246-250 Romford Road LONDON E7 9HZ
Telephone number	07858 137433
Email	faithfostercare@hotmail.co.uk
Registered person	Faith Foster Care Ltd
Registered manager	Rehna Rakhshinda Shiraz
Responsible individual	Naveed Ali
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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 emergency, short term, mother and baby provision to long-term placements.

The fostering service has appointed a new manager who during the course of the inspection was successfully assessed to become the Registered Manager. The fostering manager is an experienced social worker and the Responsible Individual is a management consultant with diverse community work experience. The service has also appointed a 'Children's Champion' whose role is to liaise and consult with children and young people in placement. The service currently has nine approved foster carers.

Summary

The purpose of the announced key inspection of Faith Foster Care Service was to assess the service against key national minimum standards and to gauge the service's success at addressing weaknesses highlighted at the previous inspection. All outcome areas were assessed.

Staff and foster carers make good efforts to ensure young people live healthy lives and there are good practices and procedures in place to keep children and young people safe. However, full information as per the regulations was not evidenced on one staff file. Membership of the service's fostering panel has changed since last year and there is noted improvement in the functioning of the panel. Exploration of the fostering panel's composition and potential conflicts of interests will act to further improve its functioning.

Foster carers and staff encourage children and young people to achieve academically and this is well documented on file. Placements also encourage young people to pursue their recreational interests. Issues of contact and consultation with young people is good and placements support young people's growing independence.

The fostering service is adequately staffed with qualified and experienced personnel. The service has good strategies in place to work effectively with foster carers; their training and support is good. The fostering service continues to develop administrative systems. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection resulted in 11 requirements. Weaknesses were identified in the monitoring of foster carers' homes, the service's child protection and safe caring policies, and notification to Ofsted of allegations made against the service. These issues have since been resolved satisfactorily.

Also resolved are the quality of the minutes of the fostering panel, the panel's functioning and decision making. The service's complaints information has been appropriately revised and there are systems in place to ensure that the manager receives supervision from a social work

professional. Foster care agreements are now compliant with the regulations and vetting procedures for foster carers have improved.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service helps support young people keep healthy while in placement. Foster carers have access to written guidance and information that address health care issues. Training is provided to foster carers. The fostering service has recently developed guidance relating to Every Child Matters and this has resulted in the service's keen exploration of young people's health care issues. Most carers are first aid trained. Young people's files evidence a dedicated section to address medical and health care issues; these issues are also routinely explored during foster carers supervisory visits. Foster carers understand their role and responsibility in helping young people live healthy lifestyles and placements have a good focus on exercise and nutritious diets. Where appropriate, foster carers provide young people with culturally appropriate meals. Young people are promptly registered with key primary care services soon after their placement starts. Young people and foster carers have access to specialist health care services such as counselling and mental health services. The fostering service provides good support to placements where disability is a feature. Foster carers who smoke are encouraged to do so outside so that this does not impact on the health of young people. However this has not, as yet been formalised into written guidance.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The fostering service supports young people to be safe while in placement. The service's Responsible Individual and the manager are suitably qualified and experienced to conduct their duties. The manager has recently been assessed suitable to become the service's Registered Manager.

Foster carers' homes are comfortable and appropriately maintained; the fostering service conducts annual health and safety checks of placement premises.

The fostering service has good systems in place to ensure the matching process is appropriately conducted. For example, the service has developed a matching form that profiles both the young person and any potential carers. The form is explicit in identifying strengths of the proposed match and highlights where there are gaps. The matching process pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity, particularly in relation to religion and cultural identity. Where placements are planned, the service facilitates introductions to enhance placement success.

The fostering service has good policies in place that address issues of bullying and young people who abscond from placement without permission. These are highlighted in the foster carer handbook and the children's guide.

The service has comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies that are well known to foster carers and staff. Both have access to good training opportunities that focus on the safeguarding of young people in placement. The service has new systems in place to help manage and monitor allegations. However, the service had not maximised full use of these systems for all complaints and allegations. All foster carer households have safe caring policies in place, as do individual young people placed with them. Supervisory visits consistently explore

placement issues relating to child protection and the safeguarding of young people. Staff conduct unannounced visits to foster carers' homes to monitor placement progress and foster carers have access to advice and support via the service's out of hours system. The fostering service's development of the post 'Children's Champion' is yet another method to gauge placement progress and any child protection issues.

The fostering service's vetting of employed staff and other personnel is good. However, all personnel files must evidence two written references in accordance with the regulations. This was not the case for the student currently in placement.

Since the last inspection the composition of the fostering panel has changed. The current fostering panel has received training and revised policies and procedures that address previously noted weaknesses are now in place. Panel meeting minutes are more detailed and are now an accurate reflection of panel discussion. The fostering service has systems in place to encourage the impartiality of panel decision making. This includes the use of conflict of interest forms upon appointment. However at least one noted potential conflict of interest between some panel members and staff of the service had not been highlighted through use of the established forms.

The composition of the panel includes professionals with a range of experience including education, health and the care system. However the composition of the panel is predominantly Asian male. Managers of the service indicate an awareness of the benefits of having more diverse representation on the panel in relation to gender and ethnicity.

The current chair of the fostering panel provides professional supervision to the Registered Manager. This brings into question his independence. Issues such as consideration of assessments, foster carers reviews' and other related matters, may have already have been discussed in supervision prior to being presented to panel. It is important that the independence of the panel chair is clear and above challenge so that carers and other professionals have confidence in the integrity of the panel and its processes.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service values diversity. There are relevant policies in place and both foster carers' and young people's files evidencing that there is a focus on issues pertaining to equality and diversity. This is particularly the case in the matching process. Foster carers and staff have access to relevant training opportunities and there are plans in place, for example, to explore issues of identity through use of life story work. The fostering service supports placements where there are issues of disability and good effort has been made to address young people's differing modes of communication. Foster carers benefit from recent Makaton training and the children's guide in part, is available in pictorial form using the Widgit system of communication.

The fostering service promotes young people's educational achievement. There is good written guidance and relevant training opportunities are available. Foster carers and staff are familiar with their role and responsibility in promoting young people's educational achievements. Staff supervisory visits consistently focus on promoting young people's education and young people's files have a dedicated educational section that contains comprehensive information. Foster carers share a good relationship with school personnel and regularly attend school based meetings. The agency acknowledges young people's academic success and these are celebrated.

The fostering service also offers additional support to aid young people's learning such as one to one tuition where necessary.

The fostering service does not offer a short breaks service to young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for children and young people. Foster carers and staff believe that contact between children in care and their family network is a priority area of the fostering task. In many cases there are intricate contact arrangements in place and the fostering service works hard to adhere to these. Contact arrangements are in accordance with local authority and court ordered plans. Where there are identified gaps in arrangements, the fostering services offers practical support to ensure plans are followed through. The fostering service routinely seeks the views and opinions of young people with regard to the impact of contact with their families and significant others.

The fostering service also promotes consultation with young people. This is the primary role of the newly developed post of 'Children's Champion'. This role is to liaise with young people to solicit their views about the service in general and explore placement developments. Young people confirm that they have ample opportunity to meet and speak with staff of the service privately. Case files indicate that supervisory visits routinely include private discussion with young people. The fostering service has made effort to provide information to young people who use alternative communication methods. For example the children's guide in part, is available in pictorial form and foster carers have received Makaton training. Foster carers and staff are aware of the service's complaints procedure. Since the last inspection, this policy document has been revised satisfactorily.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering service prepares young people to live more independent lives. Foster carers have access to training and supervision focussed on this aspect of the fostering task. Carers demonstrate practical work they have completed with young people to achieve greater independence. For example, a current mother and baby placement is supporting a young mother to care safely for her child, while another placement is developing the independent living skills of a young person who has learning difficulties.

The fostering service has good financial systems in place and foster carers indicate that they receive prompt payment at the expected rate. The service has also provided foster carers with advice and guidance with regard to their entitlements.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a comprehensive revised statement of purpose document in place that outlines the aims and objectives of services provided. However, information reviewed in the document pre-empted the appointment of the Registered Manager and does not include information about the number of complaints received. The revised children's guide is an informative, creative guide that is geared towards the use of young people in placement. Young people confirm that they have received a copy of the guide.

Staff of the fostering service are organised and effectively managed and there are clear management structures in place. There are good systems to ensure that foster carer assessments, approval and reviews are conducted appropriately. Staff are managed and monitored by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications. Staff have access to good training opportunities. For example both the registered manager and the administrative officer are currently completing National Vocational Qualification Level 4 training in management. Foster carers files contain training profiles.

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced staff and are planning to further recruit. Staff share a collaborative working relationship with placing authorities and staff are properly accountable and well supported. There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers;

assessments are robustly completed. Foster carers have access to a good training programme that continues to develop and incorporate the Children's Workforce Development Council training. Two foster carers have completed this training. Support and supervision is good and foster carers attend periodical support group meetings. The fostering service's out of hours provision is effective and foster carers can access respite services if they wish.

The fostering service pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity. Foster carers and staff of the service are familiar with policy guidance relating to equality and diversity. The service's matching procedure is a good illustration of the organisation's commitment to ensuring that the holistic needs of children and young people are met while in placement. Staff are committed to operating within an anti-discriminatory framework.

The service's administrative support is good and the service continues to develop administrative systems. Staff generally maintain good administrative records. However, as previously mentioned in this report, staff are using some newly developed systems that are yet to maximise service efficiency in relation to complaints and allegations in that at least one identified by the inspector was not noted in the formal records.

Young people's records are detailed and current; staff actively pursue any missing information from the placing authority. There is policy guidance in place to address issues of case recording and foster carers have access to relevant training.

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
15	ensure that there is full and satisfactory information in relation to personnel working for the purposes of the fostering service. (Regulation 20)	1 December 2009
30	ensure that the person appointed to chair the panel is sufficiently independent (Regulation 24.2.b)	1 January 2010

25	maintain effectively a system for monitoring matters set out in Schedule 7, in particular with regard to complaints and allegations. (Regulation 42)	1 December 2009
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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):

- consider issuing written guidance with regard to carers who smoke and care for young children (NMS 12)
- explore potential conflicts of interest amongst employed staff of the service and members of the fostering panel (NMS 30)
- review membership of the service's fostering panel with a view to establishing more diverse representation in terms of gender and ethnic origin. (NMS 7)
- include details of the number of complaints received by the service in the statement of purpose document (NMS 1)