

# Integrated Fostering Services Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC400955
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 May 2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Paula Eaton
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	12 October 2009

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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**

Integrated Fostering Services Ltd. is an independent fostering agency owned and operated by a private provider. It is located in offices in a business park in Enfield. The premises comprise of an open plan office with computer equipment and a meeting room. There are toilet and kitchen facilities. The agency provides short and long term foster placements for children and young people.

### **Summary**

This was an announced, full inspection that looked at all the key National Minimum Standards. All outcome areas were assessed.

The agency has only been in operation for a short period of time and there were only six approved foster carers and five children and young people in placement at the time of the inspection. The agency has developed sound systems for completing assessments of prospective foster carers and supporting foster carers and the children and young people in placement. Foster carers feel supported by the agency and are clear about the expectations of them in the role of foster carer.

The agency has good administration, recording and monitoring systems in place and an effective fostering panel has been established for the agency. Records are not always fully completed in relation to risk assessments and recruitment records, and some policies require amendment.

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 since the agency was registered.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The agency has established systems for assessing and meeting the healthcare needs of children and young people placed with foster carers. This includes appropriate policies and procedures relating to healthy eating, infection control, medication, health promotion and smoking, alcohol and drug misuse. The foster carers handbook also contains information relating to healthcare issues and foster carers find this a useful reference tool.

Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities in relation to meeting the healthcare needs of the children and young people in their care. All children and young people are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician, and the outcome of any appointment attended is recorded and discussed with agency staff as well as the child's social worker.

Although risk assessments are in place for each individual child these do not always contain all identified risks and strategies arising. The agency does not always obtain the necessary consent for medical treatment that is required from placing authorities for children and young people placed. However, the agency has evidence of letters sent to placing authorities requesting this

information and is looking at ways to resolve this issue. First aid training has been provided for foster carers in the last month.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Robust systems are in place for ensuring that foster carers are able to provide a safe and secure environment for children and young people. A comprehensive health and safety check is completed as part of the assessment process and health and safety is also considered as part of each monthly visit to foster carers. Pet questionnaires are also completed for those foster carers who have pets. The foster carers homes visited during the inspection were very homely, warm and clean.

Appropriate systems are in place for matching children and young people to foster carers who can meet their needs. Although very few placements have been made with the agency, it is clear that matching processes are being implemented to find the most suitable foster carers to meet each child's cultural, religious, physical, social and emotional needs.

Appropriate policies are in place with regard to safeguarding children and young people. Clear safe-caring guidelines are in place which foster carers sign to confirm that they have read and understood what is expected of them. Child protection policies and procedures are in place including clear guidance for staff and foster carers regarding the action they should take in the event of any concerns that they have. The agency also has appropriate policies and procedures in place in relation to behaviour management, unauthorised absence, whistle blowing, bullying and confidentiality to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded. There have not been any child protection concerns since the agency has been registered.

Sound systems are in place for the recruitment of staff. However, there are some gaps in the information contained in staff employment files and the records for panel members. For example, not all files had proof of identification and not all gaps in employment had been explored. The Registered Manager verifies all references and records details of his contact with referees. Qualified social workers carry out assessments of prospective foster carers.

The agency has established a fostering panel that has the appropriate membership. The panel members have a variety of experience and expertise and include a foster carer and an education welfare officer. The panel fulfils its quality assurance function and appropriate recommendations are made following an exploration of the assessments presented. All panel members have attended two days panel training provided by an external agency.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The agency is proactive in exploring equality and diversity issues and has developed an equality and diversity action plan that is in its early stages. Equality and diversity issues are explored throughout the assessment process for prospective foster carers and every effort is made to ensure that children and young people are appropriately matched to foster carers who can meet their individual needs. Foster carers understand the need to promote equality and diversity issues and support and encourage children and young people to explore their own views. Appropriate equal opportunities policies and procedures are in place.

The agency has an education policy in place and foster carers are issued with clear guidance regarding meeting the educational needs of children and young people. Foster carers demonstrate a commitment to meeting the educational needs of children and young people by providing adequate space to study, liaising with schools and other educational establishments and supporting children and young people with homework and travel arrangements.

The agency provides a short breaks service for foster carers as well as for birth parents. There is an appropriate policy in relation to this. However, the agency has yet to develop this guidance further to include details of what arrangements will be put in place to enable foster carers to receive the two weeks respite care that the agency intends to provide.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Sound systems are in place for ensuring that children and young people maintain relationships with their families, friends and other significant people in their lives. Foster carers understand the importance of supporting children and young people to maintain contact and facilitate this.

The agency has introduced good systems for consulting with young people. A questionnaire has been developed to enable children and young people to provide information about themselves, when they are placed with the agency and another questionnaire has been developed to ascertain their views about the service provided. Children and young people are also encouraged to contribute to their placement plans and reviews and the agency is proactive in supporting children and young people to do this. Foster carers are able to express their views through support groups and feel listened to by the agency.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The agency has appropriate guidance in place for staff and foster carers in relation to preparing young people for independence. Placement plans for young people include the support they need to develop independent living skills and foster carers understand the importance of encouraging young people to develop these skills. Records show that young people are included and involved in the decision making process in relation to plans for their future.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

There is a satisfactory statement of purpose in place that contains all of the required information. The agency has also developed a children's guide that is available in written and CD formats. The guide has also been produced in three different formats for three different age groups and includes information about contact, education, bullying, complaints and rules.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency has developed an equality and diversity action plan and completed a thorough analysis of all aspects of equality and diversity within the agency and identified any gaps. The matching process carefully considers the individual needs of children and young people and the agency has explored ways of introducing events that explore and celebrate difference within society.

The agency is currently very small and there is a line management structure in place. However, managerial arrangements involve the principal officer supervising the Registered Manager

whilst the principal officer is currently acting as supervising social worker for the agency. There are clear procedures in place in relation to charges made to placing authorities and the allowances paid to foster carers.

A clear induction process is in place for staff and they receive regular supervision to support them in their role. Although the social work staff employed by the agency have limited experience of working within the fostering field, they do have a wealth of experience of working with children and young people and their families. Staff feel supported and have been provided with internal training sessions on the internal policies and procedures of the agency. External training is also to be provided and the administrator has been booked onto training for taking minutes at panel meetings. Regular staff meetings are taking place. The staffing numbers for the current level of carers is good. There are appropriate systems in place for carrying out assessments of prospective foster carers and the quality of the assessments is good, however, childlessness is not always fully explored during this process.

The agency is currently recruiting foster carers at a steady pace through advertising at local job centres in different areas to attract carers from a diverse mix of cultural and religious backgrounds. Support groups have been introduced for foster carers. The agency organised a trip to Southend for foster carers and their families that helped the foster carers (who are all new to the agency and new to fostering) build links with each other. Foster carers are contacted on a weekly basis and visited at least monthly and feel supported by the agency. However, the visit records maintained, although comprehensive, do not clearly show if the children and young people in placement have been spoken to. There is a comprehensive foster carers handbook in place and all foster carers have received preparation training and training on the procedures for managing unauthorised absences and first aid. Further training is planned for the coming year.

Systems have been established to deal with complaints and allegations sensitively to ensure that the best outcome is reached to safeguard children and young people in placement and support foster carers. However, the complaints procedure for children and young people contains a statement about the placing authority having to be told prior to an external agency being contacted about any concerns which is inaccurate.

Records relating to each child and young person placed are maintained detailing their needs and how these will be met by the foster carers and any external agencies. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding keeping records and can demonstrate their understanding of what must be recorded.

Sound administration systems are in place for the maintenance of all records. These are kept securely and are generally maintained to a good standard. Monitoring systems are in place so that any issues regarding recording can be identified and addressed.

## **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
12	ensure individual risk assessments are completed for any identified risk to children and young people, including any strategies to be used to minimise the risks (Regulation 11(a))	25 June 2010
12	ensure that the agency has written, signed consent to seek medical treatment for children and young people where required (Regulation 17(3)(b))	25 June 2010
15	ensure that staff recruitment files, including those for panel members contain all of the required information. (Regulation 20(3)(d))	25 June 2010

## Recommendations

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

- develop clear guidance outlining the details of the short breaks arrangements for foster carers (NMS 31)
- update the complaints procedure to ensure that the information is accurate (NMS 22)
- record any discussions that have taken place with children and young people during visits to the foster home (NMS 22)
- explore childlessness during the assessment of prospective foster carers. (NMS 17)