

Progress Children's Services Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC036627
Inspection date	30/11/2010
Inspector	Suzanne Young
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	01/07/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

Progress Children's Services is an independent fostering agency part of Progress Children's Services Ltd. They are based at their head office in Wolverhampton. They aim to achieve positive outcomes for looked after children and young people. The agency provides a diverse range of quality foster care placements including carers who specialise in providing care for children with disabilities.

At the time of the inspection the agency supports 28 foster families who care for 34 children and young people.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This is a full, key inspection which was announced. During this inspection all key standards were inspected. These standards relate to all areas of the Every Child Matters framework and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of additional standards relating to the management of the agency and the supervision of foster carers. All areas of the Every Child Matters framework were assessed.

The agency is judged as satisfactory overall with good outcomes being achieved in ensuring children and young people's health needs are promoted, in helping children and young people to enjoy and achieve and in enabling children and young people to influence decisions about their day to day care. The agency also has developed good practices to meet the diverse needs of children and young people and ensure all children and young people have equal access to opportunity.

The agency has some shortfalls in relation to safe caring, the timeliness of foster carers' reviews and in record keeping.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has taken action to comply with the majority of requirements identified at the last inspection. Staff vetting procedures have improved. The fostering panel ensures no business is conducted by the fostering panel unless all required members are present and a record is made of the reasons for its recommendations. Assessments of prospective foster carers are comprehensive and carried out in accordance with regulation. The agency's complaints procedures are detailed in the children's guide to ensure children and young are aware of how to make a complaint.

The record of each placement with a foster carer now includes the areas required by legislation but is not being kept up-to-date.

The majority of recommendations made at the last inspection have also been complied with. Evidence of matching and identifying areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer is still not being demonstrated. Safe care guidelines that are relevant and appropriate to each child are also not being adequately completed. These recommendations will be remade.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering agency delivers good health outcomes for children and young people as their health needs are being promoted by the agency. Young people's health care needs are being identified and met during the referral and planning stages. All required information and documentation relating to the health needs are gained at the point of referral and the arrangements for medical consent are clearly established.

Policies and procedures are in place although the smoking policy is not in line with current guidance. Children and young people are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians to ensure that they are able to receive the medical care and attention they require. Specialised health services are sought when it is required. Supervising social workers discuss health matters with foster carers during their supervision sessions.

Carers record all information relating to health and medical appointments in daily records. A written health passport in the form of a red book has been developed specific to each child and young person to track and record health needs. This is kept up-to-date and moves with the young person through transition to further placements and into independence.

Foster carers and supervising social workers receive training and guidance on a variety of health matters. Individualised support and training is also provided for foster carers to meet the specific health needs of individual children. Children and young people are encouraged to lead healthy active lifestyles by foster carers, such as attending after school clubs and engaging in activities such as horse riding and swimming. The promotion of healthy eating and lifestyles ensures children and young people are able to develop positive lifestyles and emotional well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a range of policies to safeguard children and young people in their care and implements procedures which reduce the risk to their safety. Generally practices and procedures within the agency help to keep children and young people safe. However, these could be compromised by some shortfalls in policies, storage of

medication and safe caring policies.

The agency ensures that foster homes are suitable for children and young people placed in them. Foster carers' homes are comfortable and friendly. The agency undertakes comprehensive health and safety checks and conducts annual unannounced visits. Although the annual health and safety checks are robust, issues such as the safe storage of medication are not being routinely checked throughout the year to ensure policies are being complied with. As a result this can compromise children and young people's protection from the risk of harm in the home.

The agency has a range of policies to safeguard children and young people in their care and implements procedures which reduce the risk to their safety. Staff and foster carers receive appropriate safeguarding training. Generic safe caring policies are in place for each fostering household, however; the level of personalisation when a child or young person is placed is insufficient. In addition the safe caring policies do not reflect the risk assessments conducted on each child. Thorough risk assessments and safe caring policies help to safeguard children and young people within their placements.

Behaviour management training which includes physical intervention is provided to foster carers. The behaviour management policy, however, does not specify that foster carers should not restrain young people without first undertaking the appropriate training. This could lead to confusion for foster carers and compromise safety. Children who may need to be restrained are also placed with foster carers without carers first receiving the appropriate training. This has the potential to place children at risk.

The agency continues to achieve some good quality matching of carers' skills to the needs of children and young people. In particular there are examples of positive matches of ethnicity and culture. However, the matching documents do not clearly identify where foster carers skills are able to meet the needs of children or the areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carers. This has the potential to compromise the quality of matching and result in the placement of children or young people with foster carers who are unable to meet their individual needs.

Foster placement agreements are being completed and signed at the beginning of each placement. These help foster carers to understand their role in meeting the needs of children and young people and results in a shared understanding of the purposes of a placement between the agency, the foster carers and the local authority placing the child or young person.

The agency has recruitment processes in place for new staff and people working for the agency. These processes are generally good. Any shortfall in vetting in relation to management has been addressed and safety measures put in place. Staff are well-qualified and experienced.

The agency operates its own fostering panel. The panel minutes demonstrate that a

quality assurance function is being provided by the panel and evidences that sound quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. Panel members receive supervision and training which means they are fully informed about their roles and functions. The fostering panel operates in line with its overall objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency actively promotes equality and values diversity through the assessment and training of carers and appropriate matching of children and young people. This enables it to meet the diverse needs of young people referred for placements. The agency also has policies to promote equal opportunities and diversity.

The agency makes good placements for children and young people with foster carers who share their cultural and religious background. This enables children and young people to participate in their religion and develop a positive sense of identity. Children and young people with disabilities are placed with foster carers who have the skills to meet their particular needs and carers are supported to meet their particular needs. Carers are given appropriate training in order to communicate effectively with children placed with them.

Carer's actively work with children and young people to promote a positive view of their own identity and those of other cultures. Foster carers encourage them to participate in activities in the community meeting young people from differing cultures. This helps the children and young people to develop self-esteem and increase their confidence in building relationships and understanding of other cultures.

The agency and carers actively promote the educational needs of children and young people and support children to maximise their potential. Foster carers support young people's education by helping young people with homework and participating in parents' evenings and meetings. They build positive communication links with schools and colleges and advocate for their educational needs to be addressed. Educational achievement and attendance is monitored through carer supervision.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Foster carers and staff encourage children to maintain and develop positive family contacts. Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining links with children's birth families. The arrangements for contact are understood at the point of placement and any restrictions are made clear. The outcomes of contact are recorded and monitored through supervision with foster carers.

The agency actively promotes consultation with children and young people. The

agency gains children and young people's views through various events, forums, questionnaires and are currently in the process of developing a newsletter and web-site. Social workers also visit children and young people to gain their views. As a consequence children and young people have an influence on the development of the agency and improvements in the quality of care provided.

Young people are aware of how to make complaints. They are given a copy of the children's handbook which contains clear information about how to make a complaint and the support available to them. There have been no complaints from young people made about the agency since the last inspection.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Foster carers support young people in developing independence skills so that they are able to successfully move into adulthood. Carers help support young people to develop independent living skills by closely working with them to develop practical skills such as handling money, cooking and making choices about their future. Young people are supported to open their own bank accounts and find college and work experience placements.

Foster carers are in turn supported by supervising social workers during supervision sessions and carers are expected to attend training in promoting young people to gain independence.

There are policies in place for foster carers to help prepare young people for adulthood.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency has appropriate management and organisational practices to support the fostering task. This has resulted in some good outcomes being achieved for children and young people. Staff understand the aims and objectives of the agency and their role in achieving those. Foster carers are clear about the support they can expect and the agency generally meets those expectations.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff and foster carers are recruited from a wide range of backgrounds which enables children's specific needs regarding their culture or religion to be met. The agency assesses the capacity of potential foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people with diverse needs. Staff and carers are proactive in promoting young people's ethnic and cultural needs.

Staff, foster carers and young people are able to understand the aims and objectives of the agency through a clear Statement of Purpose, policies and procedures, carers' handbooks and children's guide. The service has a sufficient number of experienced

and qualified staff. The agency can also call on support workers from the organisation's residential sector if required. The agency uses external assessors to assess prospective foster carers as well as their own social workers.

Assessments of prospective foster carers are detailed and comprehensive. Reviews of foster carers are taking place to ensure their continued suitability, although, these are not all being completed within a 12 month period as required.

Foster carers feel well supported from the agency which in turn enables them to effectively support the children who are placed with them. A good system of appropriate supervision and support is in place for foster carers. Supervising social workers visit foster carers on a monthly basis to address issues of practice and professional development.

All foster carers have foster care agreements in place. These however do not include all matters required by legislation. They do not contain details of foster carers' terms of approval and it is not explicit that foster carers must comply with the agency's policies and procedures in respect of child protection and behaviour management.

The agency makes a commitment to the training and development of staff and foster carers. A comprehensive programme of training has been developed alongside the commitment to delivery the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards for foster carers. A number of foster carers are also undertaking National Vocational Qualifications in caring for children.

There are procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance. The agency has appointed a lead person to undertake the work, alongside the manager, to develop the quality assurance functions of the agency and improve quality of care.

The agency has administrative systems in place to support the fostering task, however, these do not all meet the legal requirements. The register of children placed with foster carers does not include the address prior to or on leaving the placement and the record detailing past placements on foster carers files are not kept up-to-date. These reduce the integrity of the records and their usefulness in any future legal matters.

Up-to-date, comprehensive records are maintained for each foster carer and young person although some young people's files contain information regarding other young people. This can compromise confidentiality.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
9	ensure the welfare of children placed is safeguarded and promoted at all times. This refers to ensuring foster carers receive appropriate behaviour management training before children being placed with them (Regulation 11 (a))	31/12/2010
16	ensure foster carers' reviews take place not more than a year after approval and thereafter at intervals of not more than a year (Regulation 29 (2))	31/12/2010
22	ensure foster carers enter into an agreement covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 28 (5)(b))	31/12/2010
25	ensure all administrative records comply with legislation. This refers in particular to Schedule 2 and Regulation 30 records. (Regulation 22)	31/12/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure guidance to foster carers and policies are clear and in line with current guidance to help promote the health of any child in their care. This refers to the policy regarding smoking (NMS 12.6)
- ensure the foster home is free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm (NMS 6.6)
- ensure safe caring guidelines are accurate and consistent with referral details and risk assessments. (NMS 9.3)
- ensure the agency evidences the elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer (NMS 8.4)
- ensure the behaviour management policy is clear that foster carers must not restrain children unless they have first received training (NMS 9.2)
- ensure a separate record is maintained for each child and young person in foster care. (NMS 24.1)