

Perpetual Care/ Perpetual Fostering

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC063316
Inspection date	29/07/2010
Inspector	Simon Morley / Jacqueline Malcolm
Type of inspection	Key

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Registered manager	POST VACANT
Responsible individual	Tahir Khan
Date of last inspection	06/06/2008

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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

This is a privately run fostering agency that has carers located in a number of different local authority areas in the North West of England.

The agency's office is centrally located in relation to its carers. Office accommodation is on three floors. There is a ground floor reception area, a number of different offices to accommodate administration staff, social workers and managers and there is also a meeting room. The first and second floors are only accessible via stairs.

The agency is registered with Ofsted and provides respite care and short term, long term and emergency foster care placements for children and young people from birth up to age 17. Young people who reach the age of 18 are able to continue living with their foster carers as young adults.

Summary

The overall quality rating is inadequate - notice of action to improve.

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

This was an announced inspection covering all the outcome areas below. The registered provider was given ample notice of the inspection.

The agency has appointed a new manager who took up her post the month before the inspection. New management systems have been set up to monitor the effectiveness of the agency and there have been some changes to social care practice. These are relatively new and there has not been enough time to see the impact on outcomes for children.

There have been four different managers in the 12 month period leading up to this inspection. The instability in management arrangements has left weaknesses in the operation and management of the agency. Most of the statutory actions and good practice recommendations made at the last inspection two years ago have been complied with. However, shortfalls in the management of the service since then have led to further breaches of regulations and national minimum standards.

The process to match children to suitable foster placements and the quality of information obtained about a child's needs prior to making a placement has been inconsistent. Due to the commitment and hard work of foster carers and their supervising social workers this has not impacted on some children who have experienced satisfactory outcomes. However, for some children outcomes, including the promotion of diversity, have been poor and in some cases their placements have been disrupted. The management, quality monitoring, evaluation and review of the agency's practice has not adequately addressed these issues. This has started to be

addressed by the new manager.

The agency panel which makes recommendations about the initial and continued approval of carers to foster children has, since at least October 2009, not met regulations. As a result recommendations made by the panel during this time period have not been valid.

There is good support for young people going through the transition to adulthood. The promotion of health for children is judged to be satisfactory and there is good support to help children maintain contact with their family. Other outcomes are judged to be inadequate and the overall quality rating is inadequate.

As a result of this inspection the registered provider is required to comply with a number of statutory actions and several good practice recommendations have been made.

Improvements since the last inspection

There are better systems in place for the management, training and appraisal of staff employed by the agency and a more planned approach to providing training for foster carers. Foster carers still have some training needs that have not yet been met; for example in relation to loss and attachment. Overall there is a better management structure in place for training and development to help ensure better outcomes for children placed in foster care.

Assessments of foster carers include all the required information to help ensure a suitable decision making process about their approval. This process now includes clear reasons for the panel's recommendations making the process more open and accountable.

With a new manager and new systems to review the agency's work the role of panel in quality assuring the agency and the ability to monitor and evaluate complaints has improved.

Foster placement agreements are still not in place as required at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The arrangements for ensuring children in foster care receive health care which meets their needs are satisfactory.

Foster carers do not always get a full a description as possible of the health needs of children before they come to live with the carers. Also records of regular health assessments that children receive are not always made available to carers in a timely manner. The foster agency recognises this as an issue and has taken action to obtain all the necessary information carers would need to be able to protect and promote

the health of children. The absence of up-to-date information about children's health needs potentially jeopardises the role of carers in ensuring the health and development of children is promoted.

Carers receive training covering a range of health issues including specific training to help promote children's individual health needs. For example, needs relating to epilepsy, emotional health, behaviour and healthy eating. This complies with the recommendation made at the last inspection about training for carers on health issues.

Carers ensure children are registered with appropriate health services, doctors and dentists and take children to their health appointments. Carers advocate on behalf of children to ensure they receive the health care they need. Carers keep records about the health care and health promotion of children and are suitably supervised by the agency. This helps ensure the ongoing health care of children is meeting their identified needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Young people experience differing outcomes in relation to how their welfare is protected and promoted. Some of these outcomes are suitable and some are inadequate. There are a number of statutory actions and good practice recommendations made in relation to this outcome area. Overall, these are significant in number and impact to conclude with an inadequate judgement.

Assessment and induction training for potential foster carers is suitable and helps contribute to the safeguarding of children and young people. Allegations about carers have been appropriately referred to the responsible authorities and suitable action has been taken to safeguard children. There has been a shortfall in notifying Ofsted of significant events which has the potential to risk the welfare of children. The new manager is aware of the regulatory requirements in this respect.

Checks of foster carer households are undertaken which ensure that children in foster care stay in a safe environment. This includes a health and safety assessment of the environment and risk assessments if carers own any pets. Health and safety assessments have not always been reviewed annually though this is now starting to happen which will meet national minimum standards.

Carers are aware of how to protect young people and receive training about safe caring, managing behaviour and the procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns. Safe caring guidelines are in place at each foster home and are the basis on which children are cared for safely. Some of these guidelines have been individualised based on children's specific individual needs and risks to their safety.

There is inconsistent practice with regard to matching and not all children placed in foster care are carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting their individual

assessed needs. This is highlighted by the fact that carers do not always get enough information about a child before placement and recent internal management audits show less than satisfactory matching. There is a lack of foster placement agreements which should have all the information a carer needs to look after a child and set out clear objectives of what is to be achieved for the child. In some cases poor matching has led to placement disruption and children having to move. The agency is aware of this issue and has taken steps to improve information gathering about a child's needs to be able to make a better match with a suitable carer. These improvements are very recent and have not yet shown demonstrable improvements in the matching process. There were also some examples of good matching that has led to more satisfactory outcomes for children.

The recruitment process for staff is suitable and helps ensure the safety and protection of children. However, there were shortfalls in practice relating to telephone verification of the manager's references and verification of why previous positions staff have worked in have ended.

The fostering panel is recruited safely and the independent members provide a good range of experience. Requirements from the last inspection about the quality assurance role of the panel, the quality of panel minutes regarding clear reasons for its recommendations and experience of independent members have all been met. However, from at least October 2009 panel meetings have not met regulatory requirements relating to panel meetings being quorate. There has not been a social worker, employed by the registered provider, attending panel meetings. As the panel has not been quorate this makes the recommendations of panel regarding the initial and continued approval of foster carers invalid. Throughout the changes in the management of the agency, the issue of panel quoracy has not been identified by the registered person. Also the overall membership of panel does not meet regulatory requirements which again has not been identified by the registered person.

Panel minutes reflect a suitable level of scrutiny of the assessments and reviews of foster carers. The failure to meet regulatory requirements has, however, impacted on assuring the decision making role of the approval of foster carers with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is inadequate.

There is inconsistency in the way that diversity is promoted within the fostering service. Positively, carers are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds but the matching process does not adequately meet the needs of children in relation to ethnicity, religion, culture and linguistic background. This is reflected in a significantly high number of transracial placements of children with foster carers. There is training available for carers in promoting equality and diversity but in several cases this has not had the desired impact. This is reflected in the use of inappropriate and poor, language, attitude and behaviour in promoting children's diverse needs. In addition

gaps in information about a child's needs prior to placement and lack of foster placement agreements leads overall to a poor promotion of equality of opportunity and poor promotion of children's individual diverse needs. The fostering agency is attempting to tackle these issues and improve outcomes for children.

The foster agency and carers are consistent in their commitment to promote educational achievement. Carers encourage and support children well and take responsibility for finding an appropriate school. The supervision of carers by the agency also helps ensure educational needs are being met. However, carers inclusion in, access to and understanding of children's personal education plans is inconsistent, some carers therefore do not have a good understanding of a child's educational needs. The fostering service has not developed a management system to track the attainment of all children placed in foster care and to demonstrate how achievement at school is being monitored and evaluated.

The fostering service has limited provision with regards to providing parents with short breaks. However, what is in place is effective at meeting the needs of children and recognises that birth parents retain overall responsibility for their children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The arrangements for children to maintain contact with their family are managed well. Carers are clear about their roles in contact because of the training at the point of induction and support throughout placement.

Carers are clear about who to contact if any issues arise as a result of children's contact with their birth families. This helps to ensure that children maintain regular contact where it is assessed as appropriate and helps safeguard children's welfare.

Carers are effective advocates for children and are able to represent children's views and get to know the children they care for well. Children value their carer's support. Children contribute to their reviews and the reviews of their carers, they are informed about their rights and how to make a complaint. Foster carer's supervisors also check children's views about their care when they visit carer's homes. Children with communication difficulties do not always have suitable means to make their wishes and feelings known about their care, which risks their needs not being met.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that carers help young people to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge necessary for adult living. Young people are able to stay with their carers after they reach 18 if this is agreed with their placing authority. Plans are in place regarding young people's futures and to support their transition to more independent living. Foster carers are effective in promoting independence

skills, choices and decision making to help young people prepare for independent living.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The overall judgement for the management arrangements of the service are judged to be inadequate. Although a new manager is in place and has started to make improvements there remain substantial weaknesses in the quality of the service. These are a result of frequent changes in the management post holder and poor management of the service preceding the new manager being appointed.

The promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. Not all children receive a bespoke service that meets all of their assessed and diverse needs as evidenced in most of the outcome areas. Not all placement matches, in particular, children placed transracially with carers are appropriate, and do not meet their ethnicity, religion, culture and linguistic needs or result in positive outcomes. The promotion of young people's positive identity and self-esteem is undermined when the organisation does not proactively detect and rectify these shortfalls.

A Statement of Purpose is in place but this does not contain all the recommended information about the agency for placing authorities and other stakeholders. Information is also given to children about foster care and there is a child-friendly guide about the agency and foster care.

There has been a number of different people managing the service in the last year which has had a negative impact on the quality of management. This has included a failure to comply with regulations in terms of monitoring and evaluating the service as well as the shortfalls highlighted in the preceding outcome areas. There has not been a satisfactory system for: monitoring the quality of care children receive; the identification of necessary improvements; and action planning.

The registered provider recruited a new manager shortly before this inspection. Since then there has been some improvements. These are focussed on an internal audit of a sample of case files. This has led in the very short term to: better supervision of staff employed by the agency and of foster carers; improved training plans; missing information about children's needs has been chased up with relevant placing authorities and there are new systems to monitor and evaluate the service. Though staff morale and motivation has improved, the impact on improved outcomes for children is not yet evident.

The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is carried out to a satisfactory standard. Carers are suitably prepared through the assessment process and induction training for the task of looking after children in care. Fostering social workers are skilled, committed and have a range of experience. They provide flexible support to carers which is rated highly and helps ensure suitable outcomes for children. There is a more structured approach to the supervision of carers that

supports the promotion of better outcomes. There is a more organised approach to providing training for carers though carers still do not always have the training needed to meet the needs of children placed with them. Most carers are very positive about the support they receive from the fostering service. A detailed handbook is supplied on approval which outlines all the policies, procedures, advice and support that the service provides.

Foster carers' records are suitably kept and provide detailed information about recruitment, approval status and the names, numbers and ages of children placed. These records are accountable and meet the minimum standard. The quality of records relating to children prior to placement is inconsistent. While some contribute to an understanding of a child's life and needs others have gaps. After a placement is made carers keep adequate records of a child's achievements and development. Likewise carers encourage children to keep photographs, certificates and mementoes of their lives. This helps children keep and have access to a range of suitable information about their childhood.

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
4	ensure there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 and for improving the quality of foster care (Regulation 42 (1) (a) & (b))	31/10/2010
8	ensure the welfare of children to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted in particular ensure that each child placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs (Regulation 11 (a))	31/10/2010
8	ensure that a foster placement agreement is in place for all children and young people placed in accordance with Schedule 6 of Regulation 34 (Regulation 34 (3))	31/10/2010
9	ensure notifications are made to Ofsted in accordance with this regulation (Regulation 43(1) Schedule 8)	31/10/2010
15	ensure that when recruiting staff if a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, so far as reasonably practicable verify the reason why the employment or position ended (Regulation 20 (3) Schedule 1 (4))	31/10/2010
23	ensure foster carers receive training that is in the interests of children placed with them, in particular provide training about	31/10/2010

	loss and attachment (Regulation 17 (1))	
30	ensure the fostering panel has two social workers employed by the fostering service provider one of whom has child care expertise and the other of whom has expertise in the provision of a fostering service (Regulation 24 (3) (a))	30/09/2010
30	ensure the fostering panel includes one of the directors of the registered provider or the responsible individual (Regulation 24 (3) (b) (ii))	30/09/2010
30	ensure no business is conducted by a fostering panel unless at least five of its members, including the chair or vice chair, at least one of the social workers employed by the fostering service and at least two of the independent members meet as a panel (Regulation 25 (1))	30/09/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure the Statement of Purpose includes the numbers of foster carers, the numbers of children placed and the number of complaints and their outcomes (NMS 1.4)
- ensure telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references (NMS 3.2)
- ensure written foster placement agreements identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between child and carer (NMS 8.4)
- ensure placement decisions match a child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family (NMS 8.5)
- ensure where transracial placements are made, the foster family is provided with additional training, support and information to help ensure the best possible care of the child (NMS 8.6)
- ensure foster carers are provided with full information about a foster child to enable carers to protect the foster child, their own children and themselves (NMS 9.7)
- ensure there are suitable means for any child with communication difficulties to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care (NMS 11.4)
- ensure that before appointing staff to work for the fostering service that enquiries have been made to verify written references (NMS 15.3)
- ensure that foster carers are involved in the writing and implementation of children's personal education plans (NMS 13.3)
- ensure the fostering service has information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of children in their foster care service. (NMS 13.6)