

# Premier Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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

Premier Foster Care Limited is an independent foster care agency. The service recruits, approves and supports a range of carers providing short and medium to long-term care for children of all ages. This includes babies, sibling groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The fostering service supports the health, welfare and safety of children and young people extremely well. Children and young people lead healthy lifestyles. They receive excellent support with their education to improve their attainment levels. They are encouraged and supported to contribute their wishes and views to all aspects of their care. This enables them to gain confidence and develop positive self-esteem. Children and young people are happy within their foster families and say that they are treated as and feel part of a family.

Foster carer recruitment continues to be at a steady pace and is mostly through word of mouth or recommendation. Assessments are detailed and provide clear and comprehensive information to enable the panel to effectively scrutinise them and make balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. Foster carer reviews are undertaken by an independent reviewing officer and provide comprehensive information to enable the panel to make clear recommendations with regards their ongoing approval. Foster carers are involved in all aspects of the planning for the children and young people's needs. They are recognised and valued as pivotal to supporting the child and as a core member of the childcare team. Contact is effectively supported and this ensures that children and young people retain contact with their families as agreed and identified within their individual care plan.

The agency ensures that carers are provided with good information about the children in placement. There is a detailed matching criteria in place and wherever possible, children are supported to visit their foster carers before moving in with them. All young people say that they feel like part of the family and feel that they are safe and well cared for. Carers maintain detailed records of all aspects of the child's development, achievements and outcomes. This enables young people to have a positive overview of their development. Carers are aware of their delegated responsibilities and this enables young people to have equal opportunities as their friends and peers. The organisation and management of the service is outstanding. There is a clear development plan in place to further enhance the services provided by the agency and to address the minor shortfalls identified within this report.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were two requirements and four recommendations made at the previous inspection, all of these have been addressed. A vice chair for the panel has been appointed and there are panel policies and procedures in place that are known and followed. This ensures that the panel operates appropriately and effectively. In addition, the panel has access to medical advice to assist in ensuring suitability of prospective carers.

The training plan for carers has been developed to include promoting independence and equality and diversity training. This training has been delivered with further training to be provided to new carers.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people have their health care needs clearly identified and have excellent access to health care services. All young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. Where identified that specialist health care support is required, this is supported, including access to children and adolescent mental health services. Carers maintain detailed health care records and this enables an overview of individual health of young people to be monitored effectively. Young people say that they feel very well cared for. One young person said 'if I don't feel very well, my carer makes sure that I have everything to make me feel better, she also supports me to understand any medication I am given and the reason why I have to take it'. Another young person with complex health care needs said 'my carers really look after me and make sure that I have all the support I need'.

Foster carers receive training on health, hygiene, medication administration and first aid. All carers maintain records of medication administered and these are reviewed by supervising social workers at each home visit. The service has developed an individual health care booklet for all young people. However, this booklet is in the process of being updated to ensure that it meets the needs of all the young people. Carers are involved in developing this in conjunction with the agency. Foster carers encourage and support young people to lead healthy lifestyles and encourage healthy eating. All young people responding to questionnaires and those that were spoken to were very positive about the food that they had. One young person said 'my carer encourages me to try lots of different food and now I have lots of favourite foods'. Carers also encourage and support young people to participate in a range of activity and leisure pursuits, including swimming, cycling, football and various sports. This promotes the physical health of the young people. The agency also holds activity days to enable the young people, their carers and birth children to participate in. Everyone says that these days are enjoyable.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people say that they feel safe living with their foster families. Children and young people say that they are very well cared for and feel part of the family. There have been no incidence of bullying and young people said if they had any worries or concerns, they would discuss them with their foster carers. One young person said 'if I am worried about anything I know that I can discuss this with my carer, they listen to me and they make sure that I am safe and happy'.

All foster carers have a detailed safe care policy for each specific child or young person. These are reviewed and updated on an annual basis, or sooner if there is a change in circumstances. In addition, comprehensive risk assessments are in place. These include health and safety risk assessments as well as individual risk assessments. These are completed by the supervising social workers in conjunction with foster carers. This ensures children and young people's individual safety is identified and promoted at all times.

The agency has a clear and detailed policy in place in the event of a child or young person missing from care. This is underpinned by the individual risk assessments. Carers are aware of the procedure to follow and feel supported by the out-of-hours service provided by the agency. One carer said 'there is always someone to contact both day and night and this makes you feel really supported'.

Foster carers know the procedure for reporting a significant event to protect and promote the safety of the young people in placement. This includes any accidents or injuries. The agency has a robust monitoring system in place to record, respond to and investigate information about allegations, disclosures of abuse or complaints from children and young people. There are comprehensive procedures in place. These are known and understood by all staff, with regards to making a referral of any child protection concerns to the local safeguarding team. This ensures that the safety of the children and young people is promoted and protected at all times. Foster carers receive training on promoting the safety of young people. This training is updated on a regular basis and ensures that carers have the knowledge and skills to promote safety for all young people in placement.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers are provided with excellent levels of training and guidance to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to promote the individual needs of the young people. Foster carers work closely with the agency and other professionals to enable the children to develop resilience, self control and improved social skills. This enables young people to develop appropriate friendships with other children and young people and positive relationships with their carers. Children responding to questionnaires and who met with the inspector during the inspection said that they

felt really happy and settled within their placement. One young person said 'I want to stay here forever because since living here I have achieved so much and feel really happy here'.

Foster carers enable young people to develop a range of social skills in a variety of settings. This includes accessing local community facilities such as: going swimming, joining community activity groups including guides and scouts and use of local leisure facilities. Foster carers are aware of their delegated authority to make timely day-to-day decisions, such as agreement to attend school trips and functions. Where this has not been agreed with placing social workers, the agency has undertaken active steps to ensure that this is put in place.

The agency has a strong commitment to supporting young people to achieve in their educational attainment. All young people in placement are attending education and where additional support is required, the agency provides educational support through the National Teaching and Advisory Service. This includes support within class or on a one-to-one basis. This resource is viewed positively by foster carers and young people. Attainments achieved by young people are measured against the national average and demonstrate, in some areas, that they exceed this. All young people have personal education plans. Foster carers are involved in the education plan meeting. This enables them to contribute to the educational planning for the children and young people that they foster.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The views and wishes of children and young people are gained with regards day-to-day decisions and planning for the future. One young person said 'I know that I can stay here until I am ready to go to college and even then I can stay here, this is my home'. Another young person said 'I am always included in conversations about my future because it is important that I let people know what I want'. All children placed said that they felt that they were part of the family and were treated as such.

Information is provided within the children's guide about what to do if they are unhappy or if they have a complaint. The guide is written in a child friendly format. However, further formats for children and young people with communication difficulties, are not currently in place. To ensure that all children are aware of what to do if they want to make a complaint, foster carers and supervising social workers confirm that children are provided with information appropriate to their age, understanding and ability. Children and young people report that that they feel able to discuss things with their carers, social workers or staff from the agency. The children and young people say that they have no concerns that any complaint made would not be listened to and addressed.

Foster carers receive training and support with regards helping children and young people understand their background and heritage. Carers encourage and support young people to keep mementos, photographs and information about their

background and the details of their achievements. This ensures that they will have a history of their lives for when they move on from their foster family.

Contact arrangements are clear and known by foster carers and young people. Where appropriate, foster carers facilitate contact and this enables the young people to have a positive experience during their contact sessions.

The agency undertakes a comprehensive matching process for all children and young people. As part of this process, wherever possible, visits to carers are facilitated. This enables children to meet with their foster carers prior to moving in and to start to building on a positive relationship with carers. This makes the transition into the foster home a positive experience for children, young people and carers. Planning for moving on from care is also detailed with young people kept fully involved in their plans for the future and any further placement. Foster carers and the agency are aware that moving on can be daunting for the young people and therefore transition plans are in place to enable effective support to be provided.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers are aware of the importance in providing young people with the necessary skills and experience for independent living. This includes supporting them to learn basic budgeting, cooking and responsibilities associated with living independently. One young person said 'my carers have been helping me to find accommodation and have supported me to learn how to cook for myself. I know that it might be a bit difficult to begin with but my foster carers will always be there for me'.

Young people are provided with support to attend further education, training and employment. Stability of placements is excellent and young people are supported to stay within their placement until they have found appropriate accommodation. The views of young people are gained by the agency and this enables them to have a voice in the services the agency provides.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The manager of the agency is experienced, qualified and knowledgeable. She competently manages the operation of the service. Supervising social workers are appropriately qualified and experienced and demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring the children and young people are provided with outstanding levels of care and support. They provide excellent levels of support and supervision to foster carers and all carers spoken to, and those who responded to questionnaires, said the level of support, understanding and knowledge of the workers is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose clearly identifies the aims and objectives of the agency



and provides a clear overview for all interested parties. This document is available via the office and also on the agency website. The children's guide is written in a child friendly format and contains information about the service. However, the information is not currently accessible for children and young people with communication difficulties. Work is ongoing regarding developing the format of this guide.

The agency ensures that robust recruitment of foster carers is undertaken and has increased the numbers of carers over the past twelve months. Further recruitment is ongoing and the agency is proactive in the recruitment of carers from a range of backgrounds to meet the diverse need of the children and young people. Assessments of foster carers are undertaken by the supervising social workers. Assessments are clear, comprehensive, analytical and evaluative. This ensures that carers' competencies and strengths are clearly identified.

An effective and competent panel has the expertise to robustly scrutinise assessments and reviews. This enables the panel to make well-balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. There is a central list of panel members in place, with further recruitment of panel members to ensure a diverse membership with a broad range of expertise and experience of social care services.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Carers are recruited to care for children with a range of needs. Equality and diversity training is provided to all carers and this enables them to have an excellent understanding and proactively support the needs of the children and young people placed.

Foster carers receive appropriate documentation with regards to the children and young people. This enables foster carers to have full details of all aspects of the young people's needs to provide effective care and support to them. Carers are clear about their delegated authority and what they can make decisions about. Where this has not been agreed with placing authorities, the agency actively pursues this to ensure that this does not impact on the lives of children and young people. Comprehensive records are maintained by carers and this provides a clear overview of how the young person is developing and achieving in all aspects of their daily lives. These records are checked by the supervising social worker at each fortnightly visit.

There is a training and development plan in place for all foster carers, with an expectation that carers will attend six training sessions per year. The agency has promoted the Children's Workforce Development Council standards for foster carers resulting in the majority of carers having achieved these, with the remaining carers working towards them. Carers report that the training programme is excellent and has enabled them to develop their skills and understanding of the children's needs. The impact of this is that they feel equipped to provide a holistic level of care and support to children and young people.

The premises of the fostering service are suitable. Confidential information is stored securely both within the office and within the foster carers' homes. Payments to carers are made in a timely manner and carers are clear about the payment

structure.

Parents, children and foster carers report that this is an outstanding fostering service. Foster carers' comments include 'I have worked for other fostering services but this is by far the best'. Comments from parents include 'the service is supportive to my child and I know that they are cared for very well'.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

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

- ensure that the children's guide is produced in a format which is appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of children who may be fostered by the service, including children with learning or communication difficulties. Ensure also that the document is reviewed annually. (Volume 4, statutory Guidance, 4.3, 4.4)