

Mosaic 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

Mosaic foster care provides specialist therapeutic family placements for looked after children who require specific assessments and/or treatment led placement. The service provides needs led, therapeutic placements for children with the underpinning principle of planning for permanency.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is the agency's first inspection following registration. This inspection was announced and covered the new national minimum standards and regulations. This service meets the majority of the national minimum standards. There are some minor administrative shortfalls around, unannounced visits to carers, recording of information and ensuring that all documentation reflects the agency accurately. There is also a need to clarify roles and responsibilities of panel members and ensure that members receive all the information available about foster carers to read prior to making recommendations for approval.

The health and care needs of the children placed in foster homes are very well met by foster carers who provide them with safe and caring environments. Children have very positive relationships with their carers. The stability of the placements is based on a matching process that is very thorough and well planned. Children are actively supported by their foster carers to achieve their potential both socially and educationally.

The agency positively promotes equality and diversity and considers applicants to become foster carers irrespective of cultural, religious or sexual orientation. Foster carers receive good support from the agency. There is a commitment to ensure that foster carers are trained to develop their skills in order to provide the best possible care for children.

Overall the service is well managed and provides a good level of care for children placed with it.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection following registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes children's physical, emotional and psychological health and makes arrangements to ensure they are able to access the health services they need. The service provides guidance in health, administering medication and first aid. Children are promptly registered with doctors, dental and optical services and other specialist health services as required. Carers support children to attend essential routine health checks and confirm that they receive relevant information in relation to health issues. Arrangements for medical consents are clear at the outset of the placement. Foster carers are very aware of their role and responsibility to keep children in their care healthy. Children's responses to questions about health in the pre inspection survey are positive.

Children live in foster homes that provide a healthy environment and the space they need. The fostering service makes visits to each carer's home to ensure that the environment is consistently safe, clean, secure and well maintained. However, on occasion, staff have contacted carers prior to these visits which means that they are not unannounced.

Children are encouraged and supported to lead healthy active lifestyles by foster carers, such as engaging in physical activities. The promotion of healthy eating and lifestyles ensures children are able to develop positive lifestyles and emotional well-being.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children's safety and welfare is promoted by the agency. The assessment process of prospective carers keenly explores issues relating to the safeguarding of children. Foster carers receive safeguarding training to ensure they are aware of their role and responsibility to support and safeguard children. There is good involvement of foster carers in the discussions about keeping safe through monthly safeguarding meetings. These provide carers with the opportunity to discuss any concerns that they may have about individual children. There is a good range of training, support and information about safe caring and there are written plans for this in place. These arrangements provide important safeguards for children.

Children who go missing are protected. There is a policy and procedure in place if children go missing from care. Foster carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they are confident that they would respond appropriately in the event of this happening.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Foster carers provide the children with calm, caring and supportive home environments. Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster families and interact positively with them. Their social and emotional needs are promoted to enable them to develop resilience and self-control. Foster carers are provided with detailed information about a child's history and their individual needs. This enables foster carers to have a clear understanding of how to manage specific behavioural difficulties. Carers confirm that they are very well supported by the agency to help children to develop appropriate behaviour. This includes training, which they describe as effective, and supervision using a range of resources to help carers manage behaviour. Children demonstrate positive relationships with carers.

Children are positively encouraged by their foster carers to pursue leisure interests. This helps the children to develop skills and improves their self-confidence. There is a clear understanding by foster carers of the kinds of activities that can be pursued, taking into account health and safety considerations. The agency supports foster carers to involve the children in normal family activities and to take reasonable risks associated with family life.

The educational achievement of children is very well promoted. Foster carers are very clear about their role and responsibility to address the educational needs of children in their care. They are proactive in putting in place strategies to support children to achieve positive outcomes in education. Foster carers liaise closely with schools and colleges, attending meetings when required. Social workers made very positive comments about the support children receive to attend education relevant to their needs. Foster carers act proactively on behalf of the child to ensure that they have the same academic life chances as other children.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Foster carers support and encourage the children to develop their self-confidence. Children experience life in a family environment where they can exercise choices within reasonable and sensible limits. They are supported and encouraged by their foster parents to take an active part in their statutory reviews. Foster carers are fully briefed about the child's care plan. They are able to make delegated decisions on the same basis as a reasonable parent would, taking into account risks and the emotional maturity of the child.

Children said that they are listened to and their views are taken into account. When asked about this a response was 'by understanding my childhood so far and understanding what I say.' The children's guide contains information about other adults who can be contacted if required. This is a well-designed document that is child friendly. The children are confident about raising any concerns with their foster

parents.

The agency promotes contact arrangements for children in accordance with established care plans drawn up by the placing authority and/or the courts. Foster carers are fully aware of the expectation that they support and facilitate contact between children and their birth family members. These can be emotionally challenging situations and foster carers are trained to manage these situations with sensitivity.

Children are initially introduced at a pace that suits the child. There is a clear recognition, by foster carers, of the emotional sensitivity of these situations. They are welcomed into the foster family and supported positively to integrate into the foster family. The service undertakes careful matching of children and foster carers to help ensure appropriate and stable placements are maintained that can meet children's needs well. It is evident that this is normal practice within the fostering agency. Children are very settled in their foster homes and are clearly very happy.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers have access to training and supervision focussed on this aspect of the fostering task. They are aware of their responsibility to prepare children to live independently and provide age appropriate support to children in developing independence skills. Foster carers demonstrate practical work they have completed with children. This includes advising and guiding them on personal relationships, preparing them for the demands of higher education, budgeting, and domestic skills. Carers support children in achieving their hopes and ambitions. Supervision records and discussions with carers confirm that children are valued as individuals and that their personal, educational and social development is promoted.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a comprehensive and robust system for recruiting and assessing foster carers to ensure that they are suitable to meet children's needs. Foster carers spoken with confirm that the assessment process was thorough and explored their life experiences, skills and knowledge of caring for children, and included exploring their views on equality and diversity. Carers confirm that the pre assessment training prepares them well for the challenges of fostering. Foster carers are provided with good information once approved. They have access to policies and procedures and a handbook which is relevant to the care and support that they provide to children in their care; these prepare carers well for the fostering task.

The fostering panel is undertaken by a core group of members, however, there is no clear central list identifying roles and responsibilities of panel members. No fostering panel was observed during the inspection; however, the minutes of three

previous fostering panel meetings were reviewed. Although each panel was quorate it was unclear as to the individual roles and responsibilities, and reasons of suitability of panel members on the central list. Applicants to become foster carers are always invited to attend the panel and are given the opportunity to present their views on the process. On occasion not all the required information is available to panel in order to make its recommendation. The lack of this information has the potential to compromise the quality of the recommendations being made. Any shortfalls are addressed prior to carers receiving any placements so children are not placed at risk.

There is a Statement of Purpose and a children's guide, so that children, carers, parents, staff and placing social workers can be clear about the aims and objectives of the service. The children's guide is appropriately designed in a child-friendly format. It contains useful information of organisations that can be contacted, which are independent of the fostering agency. This includes the office of the Children's Rights Director. The service has clear procedures in place for matching children with prospective carers. Case files evidence that all parties are fully consulted in an attempt to secure the best possible match for looked after children that meet their long-term needs. Children are well matched to their foster carers, they are very settled and happy in their foster homes. Effective matching of children with carers helps to ensure placement stability.

The fostering agency is managed by those who are suitable to work with children. It is managed effectively and efficiently delivering a service which meets the needs of the children placed. The agency is very small with currently five fostering households approved. The manager is a qualified social worker and has an excellent knowledge of child care and fostering. During the registration the manager was to commence an appropriate management qualification, however, this has been delayed. The manager is aware of the need to complete a relevant qualification within the required timescales. The staff group are well-qualified with extensive knowledge and experience in working with vulnerable children. Recruitment procedures are in place and ensure that all appropriate checks are undertaken. Copies of references in relation to panel members' are not all kept on the central file.

Training is readily available to carers who are very complimentary of the quality of training provided. The programme of training has been developed alongside the commitment to deliver the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards for foster carers. Carers are able to access advice and guidance as necessary, to ensure consistent high quality care is provided for the children. Carers are very positive about the ongoing training and regular supervision that they receive. Comments from carers include 'Mosaic is a very good company; the staff go beyond their duties to help you.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service works closely with children and carers to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. Carers say that the service is good at responding to equality and diversity matters. Foster carers have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and know how to refer to the agency any issues or concerns. There are systems in place for managing financial viability, serious incidents, allegations, complaints and

notifications to Ofsted. The service has received no concerns since registration.

Carers confirm that they receive their payments in a timely manner and there are no issues with their payments. Records are generally well maintained and clear, and contribute to child's understanding of their life. However, some of the records are not being kept by the agency as required. For example, recordings do not consistently refer to the agency; on occasion the language used is not appropriate. This does not affect the outcomes for children.

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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
26 (2011)	ensure that the written report referred to panel contains the information required by Schedule 3 (Regulation 26.2)	30/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster homes are inspected annually, without appointment, to ensure they continue to meet the needs of foster children (NMS 10.5)
- ensure that the service implements clear written policies and procedures on the recruitment to, and maintenance of, the central list of persons considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel (NMS 14.1)
- ensure that the registered manager enrol on a management training course and obtain a relevant qualification within three years of their appointment (NMS 17.3)
- implement a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 26.2)