

Perpetual Care/ Perpetual Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sue Winson
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Date of last inspection	29/07/2010

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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 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 satisfactory.

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

This is a satisfactory service with good aspects. It is a child-focused agency which achieves largely stable placements where children's needs are met. Placing social workers commented that children are settled and making progress and there is 'excellent' communication between them and the agency. There have been considerable improvements in outcomes for children during the last year and this has been achieved through stability of management and staffing. Most notably, children's needs in terms of health, education, safeguarding, independence skills and contact are now well met. They are routinely asked for their views and consulted, as are the sons and daughters of foster carers, and the agency celebrates their achievements in all walks of life. Their progress and safety are monitored through supervisory visits and foster carer reviews, to which they contribute. Training programmes have been developed which foster carers find useful and informative, and they are well supported to meet children's needs. The manager and staff have a wealth of experience and are supported by efficient administrators. Management systems to monitor and audit the quality of service are evolving and there is a strong commitment, shared by all staff, to continued improvement for the benefit of children and young people placed.

One action has been raised in relation to the content of foster placement agreements. Four recommendations have been made concerning an omission from the children's guide, lack of information from placing authorities and monitoring systems.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has worked to address the considerable number of actions and recommendations made at the last inspection, with a high degree of success. All the actions have been addressed. For example, matching and placement planning is now more robust, staff recruitment is safe and panels are constituted in line with national minimum standards. The only recommendations which have been repeated are in

relation to foster carers having full information and being involved with children's personal education plans.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children in foster care live in healthy environments where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and their care meets individual needs. They receive specialist services when necessary. Examples were given where foster carers have identified health concerns and ensured they are addressed in a timely way. Young people benefit from their foster carers being clear about their responsibilities to promote healthy lifestyles. They understand what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle. In addition, their health needs and progress are regularly monitored on supervisory visits and annual unannounced visits.

Children and young people live in homes which provide adequate space to a suitable standard. Regular health and safety checks, including pet assessments, are updated whenever a child is placed to address their individual safety. Fire-in-the-home action plans ensure they know how to evacuate the house if necessary.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people say that they feel safe in their foster homes, know how to make a complaint and that their foster carers talk to them about risks and keeping themselves safe. They commented that their foster carers, 'usually go on about safety and what not to do'. Children are further protected by agency practices. For example, each fostering family is trained and has safe caring guidelines which are updated on placement to meet the needs of the individual child. Risk assessments are compiled and reviewed regularly and these demonstrate that young people are encouraged to take appropriate risks as part of growing up in a planned way which balances safeguarding with emerging independence. Young people are being educated about internet and e-safety by their foster carers, who have been appropriately trained to do so.

Children and young people receive good quality information which informs them of their rights to be free from bullying, and which also contains information about national organisations who they can contact. Positively, the leaflets also stress that adults can be bullies. Examples were given which demonstrate that children are protected because their foster carers are alert to the potential for bullying and take action to address any issues which arise. A very small number of children have been absent without authority and they are safeguarded as far as possible by their foster carers following guidelines and working with the police and others. Placing social workers commented that the agency provides safe and appropriate placements which meet the needs of children placed.

Recruitment of staff and foster carers serves to protect young people. Full checks are taken up for foster carers and others who may be involved in their care. Personal referees are interviewed in depth, including former partners and adult children. Systems are in place to ensure checks are regularly updated to maintain children's safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children and young people in foster care enjoy positive relationships with their foster carers and commented that they are well cared for. They benefit from largely stable placements and the fact that foster carers receive training and support to manage their behaviours in positive ways. They and their carers have access to advice from professionals external to the agency where necessary. Older young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour and are well supported to do so.

Education is well promoted and children and young people are supported to attend and achieve. They have been involved in choosing schools, and their carers communicate well with the teachers and where necessary advocate on young people's behalf to ensure they have appropriate education and equal opportunities. Where it is in their interest to remain in schools at a distance from foster homes, their carers take and collect them and also ensure they have opportunities to make friends locally, for example, through leisure activities. Children and young people reported positively about their leisure opportunities, including trips out and holidays.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children and young people know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care. Their comments were all positive about being able to talk to their foster carers and included, 'I listen to them and they listen to me'. There are a range of opportunities for them to express their views, and they do so, and say that they are listened to. Many of them attend their statutory reviews and are supported to express their views. They, and the sons and daughters of foster carers, are consulted and involved in the agency, for example, through celebration days, contributions to foster carer reviews and supervising social worker visits.

Individualised care helps children and young people to develop self-esteem, identity and confidence. They benefit from being cared for by foster carers who are trained in life story work and keep memory boxes and mementos for children to take with them when they move on. They receive pocket money and have age-appropriate choice in buying clothes and personal items. Many of them enjoy cooking and choosing the food they eat, under guidance of their foster carers. They are well supported to gain the skills and emotional resilience for independent living and adult life.

Children and young people have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their family and friends. They gain from their carers receiving effective training to help them understand the importance of continuing contact and their role in maintaining positive relationships with parents and family members where possible. They benefit from their foster carers devoting considerable time and energy to facilitating contact, sometimes over long distances.

Wherever possible, children and young people move into, and leave, foster homes in a planned and sensitive manner. Where placements are planned, they receive welcome packs which are prepared for them specifically and have the opportunity to visit the house beforehand.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are prepared for and well supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential. They all said that they are helped to plan ahead, and comments included, 'I am told to think about my future and am always given advice'. They are developing skills for life from an early age and the agency has its own version of pathway plans which is used to avoid young people having to wait for their local authority version. Some young people have been supported to succeed in further education and gain work. They and their foster carers are involved in compiling and implementing pathway and transition plans to ensure they make progress. Some young people have been able to remain in placement after their 18th birthday to maintain stability, and the agency has continued to provide support, supervision and training to their carers.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Children and young people receive highly individualised care. They are informed of their rights, and complaints information is provided in different formats to increase accessibility. They increasingly benefit from well trained foster carers, and attendance at training events has been achieved through use of a fully accessible venue, weekend sessions and positive promotion of training. Equality and diversity and equal opportunities for looked after children run through policies, procedures and practice.

The agency's Statement of Purpose gives clear information about its aims and objectives and the services provided. The children's guide is available in two appropriate formats for different age groups and contains photographs of the staff of the agency, a complaints form and an envelope, and contact details for national organisations. It does not contain information about Ofsted's Children's Rights Director.

There are clear procedures for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. They

report that the process was explained and followed in practice. In-depth assessments focus on their ability to care for children and include summaries and analysis. All complete preparation and mandatory training prior to children being placed. The fostering agency has successfully increased the range and take up of mandatory and ongoing training, to the benefit of children placed. In addition workshops have been held to support foster carers, all of whom have now completed the Children's Workforce Development Council training. To meet the needs of individual children the agency is able to provide specific training where necessary. Foster carers value the training and commented positively about the range, content and quality. They have personal development plans and expressed a commitment to continuing to increase their skills. Children and young people contribute their views to annual foster carer reviews, all of which are presented to the fostering panel.

The panel chair and members have a range of relevant experience and are child focused. Panel administration is efficient and ensures that members have time to read information in order to contribute to discussions. The panel is properly constituted under the new national minimum standards, and appraisals of the chair and members are planned to take place in the near future. The agency decision maker is suitably qualified. Applicants are invited to approval panels and are welcomed. Foster carer agreements do not contain all the required information and some have incorrect approval details as they have not been updated following changes.

Foster carers receive high levels of support to assist them in meeting children's needs, which they value. They understand that supervisory visits monitor their practice and outcomes for children. They value the support and commented that they can contact someone any time of the day or night. They were also very positive about the way in which their own children are involved in the assessment and the fostering task and can attend some of the training. The foster carer handbook is clear, comprehensive and well indexed and they commented that it provides a useful reference point. Foster carers' views of the agency are gathered at various stages and they say that they feel part of the agency and are involved in the improvement agenda. Comments made by foster carers about the agency included, 'we feel confident in their ability to support us', 'they are always there', and, 'we feel fully supported in all aspects of our role which helps us provide quality care, stability, safety, encouragement, nurture and love in a family environment for any children placed with us'.

The fostering agency only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match where they are confident that the child's needs can be met in placement. Where possible, planning meetings take place to ensure full information is shared with all parties. Despite some efforts to gain full information from placing social workers, gaps remain which have the potential to affect matching and outcomes for children. These include educational information and minutes of children's reviews. Placing social workers were positive in their comments, stating that children live in 'a lovely warm environment where he feels very much part of the family', 'is happy, content and has every possibility of achieving success in his life', and 'are provided with a high standard of care and support'.

The responsible individual, managers and staff of the agency are suitably qualified and experienced. Social workers have a range of experience, including child protection and have access to ongoing professional development. The manager's leadership and open style is valued and all staff are enthusiastically involved in improving the service and outcomes for children. The manager has applied to register with Ofsted. Auditing and monitoring systems have been strengthened, however, they do not yet fully provide analysis to identify patterns and trends and drive improvement. Complaints are dealt with in a timely manner and are monitored.

The premises used by the agency are suitable for purpose and allow for confidential records to be safely and securely stored. The importance of clear and comprehensive recording is understood by foster carers and their records are checked on supervisory visits. A young people's guide to their records has been compiled to inform them about access. Where foster carers seek to move to another provider full information has been provided in response to requests for information.

Payments to foster carers are made regularly and they are informed about allowances. The agency provided evidence of financial viability.

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
27 (2011)	ensure that foster care agreements cover all matters specified in Schedule 5. (Regulation 27(5)(b))	31/10/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers have up-to-date information about each child's educational progress (NMS 15.2)
- ensure that children know how to contact the Children's Rights Director (NMS 1.5)
- ensure that there are effective procedures for monitoring the activities of the service to identify patterns and trends (NMS 25)
- follow up any gaps in information from placing authorities, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs. (NMS 8)

