

Ryancare Fostering Ltd

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

Ryancare Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency based in Wanstead, East London. The service has operated since 2002 providing short-, medium- and long-term fostering for children from birth to 18 years of age, including parent and child placements.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This is a very child-centred and well-managed service. A professionally qualified, well-supported staff team provide excellent support to carers. A carer commented 'our fostering experience has been enhanced by their support, guidance and dedication.'

Careful matching ensures many children enjoy the stability of long-term placements. There is a strong focus on improving children's life chances through education, hobbies, interests and activities. Carers strongly advocate for the children in their care and want them to do well. There is excellent promotion of equality and diversity. Children's safety and good health are very well promoted with some excellent outcomes.

Children's changing needs are effectively monitored through monthly summaries. These report on children's progress under the Every Child Matters outcomes. Individual needs are well respected. There is very effective monitoring of all aspects of the agency. Staff and management focus on continuously improving the service that carers and children receive. Carers can make any suggestions for improvement and 'have a voice through our support and consultation groups'.

Two recommendations are made to further improve practice relating to recruitment and the timing of support and training.

Improvements since the last inspection

This section is not applicable because no actions or recommendations were made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements to meet children's health needs. Commenting on the outcomes for a child they look after, a carer said 'their life has changed drastically for the better. They are much happier, more confident and healthier. A lot of this is due to the help I have received from my agency.'

Health information is fully explored at the matching stage to ensure that carers are able to support children's specific health needs. The agency is very resourceful in making sure children get the specialist health services they need, for example, in funding therapy for children to ensure they receive this in a timely manner. Any specialist equipment is provided to meet children's special needs. Carers ensure all children have access to primary health care services in their local area to support their general health needs. Training in first aid for carers ensures children are looked after by adults who can deal with minor health complaints and injuries.

General training in health and medication equips carers with the information they need to support children's health. Experts are invited to support groups to discuss specific health matters, for example, sexual health and drugs and alcohol; this extends carers' knowledge and helps them support children to make healthy lifestyle choices. Specialised training is also provided to individual families; the agency employs experts to help carers understand the specific needs of the individual children they are caring for. Such training has been very beneficial in supporting placements where behaviours have emerged due to children's attachment difficulties.

Appropriate health records are kept. Child friendly 'health passports' provide children with their own personal record of their development and all health interventions. This provides children with a clear record of their health for when they move on. Health matters are discussed with carers in supervision meetings and summarised in monthly reports. This ensures children's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are identified, supported and monitored.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted. Carers encourage children to take exercise, eat healthily and have an active lifestyle. Children also build confidence and self-esteem through the many activities they are encouraged to participate in.

Children live in healthy environments. Carers are trained in health and safety matters and understand their responsibility to provide a safe, well-maintained home. Effective monitoring, for example by unannounced visits to carers' homes and annual health and safety checks, ensures foster homes are maintained to a good, safe standard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency supports carers to provide safe care. Training ensures carers have appropriate skills to look after children who may have experienced abuse or those who have disabilities. Carers and staff are clear about their duty to report any concerns in line with the agency's robust safeguarding policy in order to protect children. Very clear safe care policies are drawn up for each household whenever a new child is placed. These policies are adapted to meet each child's needs and behaviours so they are pertinent to the individual and promote their safety.

Carers form positive, nurturing relationships with children. Children are encouraged to talk to their carers, share their concerns or worries and seek help. Carers are aware of any signs which may indicate a child is at risk of harm and take action to keep them safe. A child described why they always feel well cared for where they are living: 'When I have a problem they will listen to me. They care for my whereabouts. They care if I am upset. If I ever need anything important they would get it for me. I feel safe.'

The agency's staff and management perform a safeguarding function by monitoring children's well-being in their placements and ensuring children are visited, observed and interviewed regularly. They invite children to contact them at any time with any worries or concerns, including by text message.

There is an effective system to manage children who go absent from the foster home without consent, although the care provided to children reduces the risk of them going missing. Children are helped to understand the dangers and risks of being away from the home without consent and are encouraged not to do this. However, when a child does go missing, carers follow a clear written reporting procedure and make use of a valued 24-hour system of support for help and advice. The agency makes sure all relevant parties know of any child's absence and take steps to prevent them going missing in the future to promote their safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is excellent support for education. For example, where excessive travel has had a detrimental effect on children's well-being, the agency has funded alternative transport to maintain the school placement and promote continuity in children's education. Individual achievements are recognised and celebrated. Carers fully support children's education, for example by helping with homework or arranging extra tuition in subjects children find difficult. A carer said they help their child's education by 'going to meetings and check on the attendance and progress in education.' All children benefit from having an education or training placement and are encouraged to attend, although a few do not attend regularly. A child said 'I love school now.'

There is outstanding support to help children take part in activities in the community. An annual 'Fun Day' and an adventure weekend provide opportunities for children to try a wide range of activities. There is considerable support to encourage all children to be active, take-up hobbies and pursue their own interests. A carer said the agency 'work with us the foster carers in promoting a positive sense of identity. We encourage a range of activities and help by developing their (children's) life skills and enhance their self esteem.'

Children are well looked after and comfortable where they are living. One child said they feel well cared for because 'they treat me with respect and love me.' Other comments were 'I get fed and comfort and looked after well by the wonderful carers' and 'I get all the things I need. Also, they get me to school on time. We also go on holiday.' Children benefit from annual holidays at home or abroad or the opportunity to take part in activities during school holidays, providing them with new, stimulating experiences.

There is excellent support and training to help carers manage children's behaviour positively. Training helps carers develop their understanding of behaviour and manage their response to any challenging behaviours. Additional support is provided to individual children where this is needed, for example, by providing extra activities or the support of a mentor.

Placement stability is strong which means the majority of children benefit from being settled in their foster homes. Careful matching of children to families also supports stability of placements. A carer commented 'they make sure the children are carefully matched to meet their needs.'

Arrangements for dealing with any incidents of discrimination or bullying are good. Carers advocate strongly for children to ensure they receive the same opportunities as those children who are not in care and do not experience discrimination.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Carers listen to children and take notice of their opinions. A child commented 'when I want to say something they always listen and take notice of what I say.' Another said 'before they do something about me they ask me.' Children are confident about raising complaints and know who they would speak to if they are unhappy or have a personal problem. One said 'I would talk to my carers or my social worker.' The agency ensures children have access to independent support and advice.

The agency supports children to develop a positive sense of their identity and background. Carers respect children's religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, helping them to feel valued. Financial support is provided to help families celebrate whichever religious or cultural festivals children most closely identify with. There is effective support to help children make sense of their past experiences and move

forward. Sensitive work is done with children from other countries to help them adapt to the host culture and language; this results in children feeling settled and gaining a sense of belonging.

Appropriate arrangements are made to support children's contact with family and friends. Carers often facilitate some quite complex, contact arrangements to make sure that children can remain in touch with people who are important to them. Carers are sensitive in dealing with any emotional impact which contact may have on children and ensure children's wishes and feelings about this are shared with the responsible authority.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are supported to gain the skills they need for their future lives. The agency achieves this by making sure carers are trained and that appropriate policies are in place. The agency's work experience initiative provides valuable work experience for children to prepare them for their working lives.

Carers contribute to pathway planning, making sure the views of children are carefully considered when thinking about their futures. Carers also work with children to complete the agency's independent skills development checklist. This checklist helps identify the skills children need to develop, for example shopping, laundry and managing money. Carers want children to succeed and encourage them to have ambitions and make the most of their educational opportunities. Children commented on how the agency helps them think about their future: 'Be independent, concentrate on education more,' and 'My carers talk to me about my job and my future.'

There are positive arrangements for supporting children when they move on from their foster home. Carers encourage children to consider the benefits of participating in further education, training or employment after leaving school. The agency has provided very effective support to ensure children can remain in their placement in order to complete their studies and improve their prospects.

Carers help smooth the transition to independent living by providing practical help, for example, by providing basic supplies to equip children's new homes and by ensuring children have the security of savings. Another positive outcome is that many children remain in touch with their carers, maintaining valued relationships when they do move on from their foster homes.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The staff team, carers and panel members bring wide- ranging skills, backgrounds and experience to the

agency. A carer said the agency 'has a multicultural staff who undertake regular training in all areas including equality and diversity.' A carer expressed their opinion on how well the agency deals with equality and diversity: 'They value diversity and promote equality. They encourage the promotion of anti-discriminatory attitudes.' Children receive a very individualised service which aims to provide them with stability and improved outcomes.

Carers benefit from a strong support network, including training, support groups and professionally qualified supervising social workers. This helps them to provide the care and support that children need. A carer commented 'we work as part of a team'. Training is provided at varied times with the option of following some training online to increase accessibility. Some carers expressed a preference for training and support group meetings at weekends.

The agency is efficient at passing on to carers any information they receive about the children being cared for. There are gaps in the information required for children's records. However, the agency does try to obtain this information from placing authorities to try to ensure that carers have full knowledge of children's needs. A carer said 'information is only as good as the agency receives from the local authority; the agency shares all the information they have.'

Carers make sure that children contribute effectively to reviews of their care plan. There are efficient systems to pass on information about significant events to appropriate authorities and families. This ensures all relevant parties are informed about the health and protection of children in a timely manner.

Information on what the agency provides is made clear in its Statement of Purpose and a welcome guide for children. These documents take into account the updated regulations and standards so people are informed of changes made to the agency's practise as a result of current legislation. The agency ensures that information is provided in a format to suit individual needs, for example a DVD version of the welcome guide for those children who struggle with literacy. Information updates are provided on the agency's website and by newsletters, sometimes written by children to ensure children's views are represented. This ensures that people are kept up-to-date about plans and changes to the agency. Children particularly enjoy receiving letters addressed to them from the agency as this makes them feel valued and important.

The service is very well managed and financially sound. An innovative use of resources provides children with improved outcomes, for example, by providing funds to help with university costs or to support particular interests. A clear finance policy ensures that children and carers receive the appropriate allowances. Strong support for savings means children accumulate often quite significant sums of money for security in their later lives.

Staff are very well supported both professionally and personally to deliver a quality service. Regular training, supervision and meetings, help management and the staff team remain fully aware of families' current needs. Carers like the small, family feel

of the agency and appreciate that all staff know them and the children they care for very well. One carer said 'the staff are excellent in helping with issues and there is always someone we can speak to if the person we want to speak to is unavailable.' Strong administrative support enables the agency to run efficiently. The premises and administrative systems are suitable to meet the aims of the service.

There are sound recruitment practises to ensure that only suitable people work for the service. This includes taking references, making checks with the Criminal Records Bureau and checking people's identity and qualifications. Telephone checks are made to verify references, but evidence of this is not recorded in all recruitment files.

The fostering panel provides a thorough quality assurance of the reports presented to it. The panel draws on specialist advice as required. This helps the panel make informed recommendations to the panel decision maker, who then communicates their decision to carers in a timely manner.

Stability of placements are a strength of this agency. For example, over a third of children have lived with their foster families for three years or more and there are few disruptions to placements. Careful matching of children to carers who can meet their needs, helps support placement stability. Where gaps in meeting assessed needs are identified, appropriate support is provided, for example, by providing a male mentor to help meet a child's gender identity needs.

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 all training and support is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by all foster carers (NMS 20.10)
- ensure telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify written references (NMS 19.1)