

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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

SWIIS Foster Care Limited is a national independent provider of foster care services. This inspection report relates to a branch of the agency based in Manchester and its satellite office in Rawtenstall, Lancashire. SWIIS provides a range of short term, long term and short break foster placements to children and young people, as well as remand and other specialist placements.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This is an exceptionally well-run service with a strong track record of achieving excellent outcomes for children and young people. This is because their needs are completely central to the running of the service and they are looked after by foster carers who provide them with stability, safety and continuity. As a result, children and young people are enabled to achieve, develop and reach their potential and their capacity to develop secure attachments and trust is enhanced.

Children and young people are safe and they say they feel safe. The agency emphasises the importance of consulting with and listening to children and young people, and their views carry weight. Management provide strong leadership and expect the highest standards of professional practice and integrity from staff. By implementing rigorous quality assurance checks and offering foster carers excellent professional support any concerns or shortfalls are quickly identified and promptly responded to. This ensures that children and young people continue to enjoy the benefits of a consistent and high quality service.

Improvements since the last inspection

The safety and well-being of children and young people have improved because the provider took steps to meet the requirements and recommendations raised at the last inspection. These related to checks on staff and fostering households, training, accommodation and procedural matters.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people enjoy very positive health outcomes. Specific health needs which may impact on future outcomes are identified at the earliest opportunity. In particular, there are significant improvements in the health status of

children with disabilities, and additional resources, including disability living allowances, are secured to support these placements. A placing social worker noted that 'the children have made amazing progress since being placed with the foster carers and have made massive health improvements'.

The good health and well-being of children and young people is actively promoted through the efficient monitoring of routine health checks, immunisations and the encouragement of healthy lifestyles. One young person noted 'I like eating healthy food. I enjoy horse riding, cycling and badminton'.

Children and young people benefit from living in foster homes where they are able to access services to meet their health needs. An in-house health advisor ensures that all children and young people receive a comprehensive health assessment and register with primary health care services. There is highly effective working between foster carers and professionals such as occupational therapists and health visitors. A health professional commented, 'I have a very good working relationship with the health advisor who seeks advice and information appropriately and has the needs of the children at the centre of her work. She will act as an advocate for children and carers to challenge decisions that have been made'.

Improving and maintaining the good psychological and emotional health of children and young people is a priority which is nurtured through the skilled interventions of foster carers and access to specialist services. In addition, children and young people's participation in a range of purposeful and enjoyable social and leisure activities contributes to this positive outcome. Young people are offered effective advice and support on a range of issues such as smoking, drug and alcohol use and sexual health. A young person commented 'I am healthy and happy, and I have lots of friends'.

Children and young people are cared for by foster carers who provide safe and nurturing homes. Environmental checks ensure that health and safety hazards are kept to a minimum and all foster homes provide sufficient space to a good standard for the benefit of children and young people. One birth parent noted that the agency provided outstanding care for their child who 'is very happy every time I see her and also very healthy'.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are protected because they are placed in foster homes where they experience care which is consistent, predictable and safe. This provides an excellent basis from which they can grow, develop and form positive attachments. A young person commented, 'I am always safe'.

The majority of children and young people choose not to run away from their foster

homes but if this occurs both foster carers and young people are supported to address and reduce these incidents. Children and young people indicate in their surveys that they are confident of who to turn to if they have a problem, and say they are aware of the complaints procedures. Children and young people confirmed that bullying is not an issue in their foster homes. One young person noted, 'I'm happy here and wouldn't want to be anywhere else'.

Children and young people are further safeguarded through a range of highly effective procedural measures. For example, prospective foster carers and employees undergo rigorous assessment and only those assessed as suitable to care for and work with vulnerable children are employed by the agency. Safe caring and individualised risk assessments are regularly reviewed and there are sound procedures for dealing with allegations, accidents and incidents. A rigorous annual review process, undertaken by an independent reviewing officer, ensures that foster carers maintain their competences and ability to keep children and young people safe.

Management make it their business to know and be fully aware of the situation of each child and young person looked after by the agency. Fostering social workers speak to children and young people on visits and at events and forums organised by the agency; this contributes to excellent overall vigilance which maintains children and young people's safety and well-being.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people receive outstanding care from foster carers who are fully conversant with their needs and warmly welcome them into their families. A placing social worker noted, 'the young person has always been treated like one of the family which has proved a positive experience'. Highly effective advice and guidance are provided to help foster carers understand and manage children and young people's behaviour in safe and appropriate ways. Any testing of boundaries within foster homes is dealt with in a way that promotes positive behaviour and is attuned to young people's individual learning and developmental needs.

Foster carers are adept at achieving a balance between acceptable risk and the wishes, views and developmental needs of young people, thus enabling them to live as typical a lifestyle as possible. Foster carers persevere and regularly 'go the extra mile'. A placing social worker reflected that a young person 'can be challenging to work with; however despite this the carer has not given up on this young person when lots of other carers may have'.

Children and young people gain enormous benefit from the high priority the agency gives to meeting their educational needs. This not only enhances their life opportunities but also promotes social inclusion. An educational professional stated that 'we have had a limited but significant number of students attend our school who have been placed by SWIIS. These students have all faced real challenge and SWIIS

have been excellent at listening to what we say and actively promoting the targets set for students. Communication has also been very good'.

Measured from the point at which they are admitted to foster care children and young people make excellent academic process. All young people are in some type of education provision and rates of exclusion are very low. An educational professional commented on the agency's ability to support children and young people to make 'excellent progress with results above national expectations'.

This is achieved because the agency is ambitious for children and young people. A dedicated education team supports children and young people from early years through to university, working closely with mainstream education providers, giving one-to-one support and running summer literacy schools. One young person noted 'I have had an excellent year', another that 'I have extra help at home and have attended summer school'.

Learning in its widest sense is promoted, and all kinds of achievements are celebrated. For example one young person has been praised for being made head girl at her school, another for taking part in circus skills at nursery and singing a song. One birth parent noted that their child 'attends lots of clubs and is achieving above expectations for her age'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are looked after by foster carers who can meet their diverse needs. Careful planning and matching ensures that placements get off to a good start and remain stable in the long term. Highly positive outcomes across all developmental areas are the result of children and young people being valued and integral members of their foster families. They experience huge emotional reward which enables them to develop a positive self-view and emotional resilience. One young person commented 'I do feel well cared for where I am living now'.

Children and young people benefit immensely from the opportunities and support the agency offers them to develop their skills and interests. This includes involvement in football clubs, theatre and youth groups, public speaking and voluntary work. There are also highly creative in-house events such as a film club and in particular the 'Oscar's Film Night' which attracted very enthusiastic feedback from children and young people.

One young person noted that 'SWIIS do loads of activities for us. I really enjoyed the Oscar night and the film club'. This type of involvement enables children and young people to develop a sense of belonging to their local and wider communities, develop social networks and peer friendships and bolsters their confidence and self-esteem.

High quality support is made available to children and young people with additional needs to ensure they prosper and have equality of opportunity. Foster carers say

that the service promotes diversity and equality issues in an 'outstanding' way. Some children and young people undertake life story work and life appreciation days, and all have 'memory boxes' of some type. This helps them to understand their sense of place in their family of origin and history. One stakeholder noted that: 'SWIIS are one of the best agencies I have dealings with. They do good work and their carers work hard to create the best conditions for children to grow, develop and recover from their experiences.'

Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining contact with family and significant others, and how this helps children and young people to develop an understanding of self. Contact arrangements are carefully considered at the point of referral, and subsequently organised in a way that enables children and young people to feel and be safe. The agency promotes very effective working relationships with birth families and this impacts positively upon the children and young people concerned.

Consultation between the fostering service and children and young people is outstanding. Children and young people are provided with frequent opportunities for dialogue and consultation and things change as a result. One young person noted, 'when the SWIIS social worker visits she is really nice and really listens and takes notice of what we say and think'.

Children and young people are directly involved in shaping services, such as preparation training for prospective foster carers, and in their own day-to-day care. For example, where children and young people have expressed a wish to be placed with specific racial or religious groups the agency has found placements that reflect these wishes.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people receive outstanding support in their preparation for adulthood. The agency ensures that there are opportunities for all children and young people to develop independence skills at a level commensurate with their age and abilities. This includes elements of self-care, helping around the house with simple or more complex tasks and saving in the bank accounts that are opened on their behalf on admission to the agency. This helps children and young people gain an understanding about the importance of taking responsibility for managing their money.

The agency ensures that foster carers are pro-active with leaving care services so that young people moving into independence have access to quality accommodation, education and career opportunities and local services.

Children and young people are encouraged to think about their future lives and careers. One young person noted: 'my carer always talks to me about further education, for example, college and university.' Foster carers provide excellent

support for young people to achieve their dreams and grow into ambitious, confident and independent young adults in charge of the choices they make. Providing children and young people with sound educational outcomes also increases their chances of becoming economically independent citizens in the future.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Children and young people benefit from receiving an outstanding level of care provided by foster carers, staff and management who bring high levels of expertise, knowledge and commitment to the task. All staff, including those in administrative posts, are well qualified often to degree or post graduate level. The agency is exceptionally well managed and senior managers provide clear leadership with the result that the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are more than fulfilled.

Every child really does matter to this agency, and children and young people benefit from the thoughtful consideration that is given to matching. The agency provides a very strong 'team around the child' and ensures that their journey through placement is emotionally nurturing, safe and successful. This is achieved because staff are fully supported in their role, enabling foster carers to provide high quality care and develop areas of particular expertise. One example of this is the preparation of children for adoption, which has helped the children concerned to move successfully on to their new families.

A wealth of training is available to both staff and foster carers to support them in all aspects of their work. Foster carers could not praise enough the excellent support they receive, and they confirm that there is very effective communication with supervising social workers. One foster carer noted that, 'without the support of the SWIIS team I would not have been able to maintain current placement' and another that: 'they listen and act; they also consult foster carers about any changes. They provide health advice and support and educational help and support. The training they put on is second to none.'

The foster panel is highly effective. It serves as an important safeguarding mechanism and exercises rigorous quality assurance in relation to the quality of assessments. This ensures that children and young people are placed only with those who have the right motivation and aptitudes to provide good quality foster care. The competence of foster carers is monitored through regular supervision, unannounced visits and annual review. The latter is conducted by an independent reviewing officer who is diligent and takes into account children and young people's opinions on the quality of their care.

The agency has robust systems for monitoring children and young people's progress and well-being. This ensures that they are safe and experience tangible, measurable benefits from their time in foster care. Management are aware of the strengths of the service and areas for development, and continually look for creative ways in

which to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Children and young people are seen as individuals in their own right and are treated as such. They are offered every opportunity to engage in the local community which helps to reinforce their sense of identity and place in wider society. Recruitment is taken into local communities in order to widen the choice of placements on offer and reflect the diversity of those areas in which they operate. The children's guide is written in child-friendly formats and in a variety of community and international languages. Carers receive excellent support for trans-racial placements and training for foster carers and staff also reflects the commitment to equality and diversity.

Paper and electronic records are in good order which ensures that children and young people have a permanent record of their history. Excellent systems are in place to provide efficient administrative support to the fostering agency, and significant information about children and young people is kept safe and secure.