

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Lynne Busby
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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 is an independent fostering service that aims to provide foster placements for children and young people who are unable to live within their birth families. The agency recruits foster carers who undergo an assessment process and once approved carers receive support and further training from a qualified and experienced social worker.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Foster carers receive excellent support from the service. The service places children at the heart of what they provide. Social workers say, 'That they remain child-focused in their approach.' There is a range of support available to carers from supervising social workers, education case workers, placement support workers and health advisors; this support ensures children receive an holistic approach to meet their individual needs. Children's attendance at school is excellent and achievements are recognised. Staff work with children individually, where a need is identified this maximises a child's potential to achieve.

Children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted. Carers are strong advocates for the children and they are consulted and have an opportunity to contribute to decisions that effect their lives. The service promotes equality and diversity throughout.

The panel and the agency decision maker make timely, quality, appropriate recommendations and decisions. The matching of children and carers is thorough and few placements are disrupted this ensures stability for children placed with carers.

The service is very well managed. Staff are well trained and supported. The manager and staff are forward thinking and have introduced a number of improvements to provide a high quality service. Social workers say, 'This is an excellent service and the foster carers are exceptional.' No requirements or recommendations were made as a result of this inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the agency has made numerous improvements and has complied with all actions and recommendations made. Children's records are comprehensive and well maintained and contain up-to-date information. A system has been set up to monitor all records and identify any trends and patterns which emerge. Action is taken to address any issues.

Children's opinions have been sought which affect their daily life and futures. Consultation questionnaires are sent to children and their views are taken into account on developments such as activities provided.

There are foster placement agreements in place that clearly cover all aspects of Schedule 6. All foster carers have copies of the agreement. The panel keeps records of its proceedings and the detailed reasons for its recommendations are included. This demonstrates the scrutiny of applications and foster carer reviews and provides clear accountable records.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are exceptionally well promoted. The children and foster carers benefit from access to a health advisor who is employed by the agency. The health advisor is very clear about their role in working in partnership with health agencies to ensure conflicting advice is not given. Advice is given on health matters such as bedwetting, smoking cessation and sexual health. Young people can get good advice and support to manage their own health where appropriate.

Health assessments are available to foster carers and any shortfall in information is promptly followed up by supervising social workers. This ensures foster carers can address any specific health needs without delay. Consents for any medical treatment are agreed at the beginning of any placement. Foster carers ensure children are registered with primary health care services and respond effectively to any health needs. Specialist health care is provided where necessary and foster carers are supported when caring for children with complex health issues.

Young people say they are offered healthy food options and have activities to promote healthy lifestyles and exercise such as taking a dog for long walks. Social workers comment that, 'Children have a healthy diet and a sleep routine and foster carers fully encourage the child's development.'

Foster carers benefit from excellent training opportunities such as first aid, medication administration and health and hygiene issues which ensures children's health and well-being is maintained. Foster carers make suitable arrangements for the safekeeping of medications.

Children live in foster homes which provide a warm and caring environment. Children have their own space which they can personalise. Foster carers are knowledgeable about health and safety issues and the supervising social workers visit regular to ensure the environment is appropriate and safe.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency provides a safeguarding culture and foster homes that promote safety. Foster carers are trained in child protection and demonstrate a good understanding of the procedures to follow. Foster carers have excellent training in safe care and there is a broad range of policies and procedures for safeguarding practices including young people who go missing without authority and countering bullying. Foster carers provide a strong sense of safety and well-being for children to develop. Children say, 'They keep me safe and healthy.' Therefore, children are protected and safe.

Children do not report bullying as an issue. Foster carers and staff have training in anti-bullying and how to respond proactively if it occurs. The training also include cyber bullying and internet safety. This ensures carers can intervene to safeguard children and promote a zero tolerance of bullying.

Young people rarely go missing from their foster homes. Foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of the children they care for and help them understand how to keep themselves safe. Foster carers have safer care plans and these are updated if any risks are identified. This ensures children are further protected.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children have developed excellent relationships with their carers. Children are positive about the care they receive and the activities they can participate in with their foster carers and agency workers. Carers provide a warm nurturing environment where children can develop and reach their potential. Foster carers spoke positively about the children they care for and those children who have moved on.

Foster carers are well trained in care and control and are given skills to equip them to deal with children who present challenging behaviour. Carers know the children well and understand how previous experience can impact on their behaviours.

The agency provides excellent support and guidance to enable children to achieve their social and education potential. There has been significant improvements in children's attendance and achievements when placed with foster carers. A teacher said, 'The impact on the pupil is dramatic and has transformed their life chances.' Personal education plans are in place and carers attend the education reviews supported by the agency education case worker. This ensures that the young person's educational needs and aspirations are clear.

Children have excellent attendance at school and achievement is celebrated by foster carers. Recognition of achievement is promoted by the agency and published in the

newsletter. Few children are excluded from school, when this occurs they are fully supported by the education staff which minimises the impact of being out of school. They ensure work is available to the child and staff work closely with the schools. In addition, education case workers will work on a one-to-one basis in school or at the foster carers' home on subjects such as mathematics, so children can meet their educational goals and maximise their opportunities to achieve. This is excellent practice.

Children benefit from a range of activities. The foster carers ensure there are opportunities for children to engage in activities and hobbies which are within the wider community such as play groups and Scouts. This helps develop their self-esteem and provides them with opportunities for social interaction with other children. The agency provides experienced placement support workers who offer social and recreational activities and undertake specific work with children according to their needs such as supporting life story work.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children benefit from having their wishes and feeling taken into account on all aspects of their care. The agency seeks children views through 'have your say' surveys which gives them an opportunity to give their opinions. The agency has set up a participation group of foster carers children who are involved in training events for new carers. As the current group of children placed at the agency are predominately under five years it is intended that when older children are placed they will be invited to participate in this group.

Children can where possible attend their reviews and have their say about future plans which effect them. Foster carers explain to children in a sensitive manner any decisions which are made and any changes to their plan. The majority of children know how to make a complaint and the children's guide gives information on who to contact if they have any concerns and how to access an independent advocate. They also have the contact details of the supervising social worker. Children feel listened to and say, 'They always listen to what I have to say' and 'They always listen, I love them.'

Where appropriate, children have constructive contact with parents and other significant people in their life. This is supported by the agency and foster carers. The child's plan clearly indicates any restrictions to contact. Foster carers will transport children where appropriate to ensure contact is maintained. Foster carers are skilled in supporting any emotional difficulties which may arise from contact. Good records are kept by the foster carers who feed back to a placing authority any issues which may occur following contact.

Children benefit from well matched placements. Supervising social workers know the carers well so appropriate matching can take place. Foster carers say, 'Children are placed with carers who have the skills and abilities to meet their needs.' Supervising

social workers are not pressurised into placing a child and they liaise closely with placing authorities to ensure they have enough information to make a decision. There are very few disrupted placements which demonstrates that the matching process is effective. Children say they are welcomed into the home when they arrive. Carers maintain links with children who move on to other carers, parents and independence.

Foster carers are knowledgeable about a child's background and they provide personalised care that promotes all aspects of their individual identity. Children are helped to understand their background depending on their age and understanding. Foster carers collect keepsakes and photographs which are presented in a memory book of all important events in their life. Life story work is completed for some children by the foster carers who are supported by the child's social worker and the agency placement support worker. Therefore, children are assisted to develop emotional resilience and a positive self-view.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency has few children placed who are ready to move on to independence. However, foster carers help children develop life skills from a young age as part of the stages of growing up. For example a two year old helping to dust and put toys away. Older children help with cooking, shopping and keeping their rooms tidy. Children are also encouraged to open a bank account and save money. Foster carers persuade children to take appropriate risks as part of growing up such as going to local shops to spend pocket money. Therefore, life skills are integral to the child's care and will help develop independence. For children who have moved to independence, carers continue to support them after they have left which enables them to succeed in moving on.

The agency has a leaving care guide for children which includes useful information such as benefits, budgeting and education and work. Training for carers in independence and transition is completed by the agency staff but foster carers say, 'It would be beneficial to be more structured.'

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency recruits carers from a range of backgrounds and cultures to meet the diverse needs of children placed. Foster carers say that training in equality and diversity is exceptional and this ensures they promote the individual care needs of children. Excellent advice, support and guidance from a range of professional and experienced staff at the agency is given. This ensures foster carers provide individualised care which develops a child's confidence and self-esteem so they can reach their full potential. Foster carers say, 'There is a brilliant diversity within the foster care group and an all inclusive

approach to children and carers.'

The agency is very well run. The manager is appropriately qualified and is supported by the staff in driving forward continuous improvement. The manager is aware of the strengths and areas for improvement and has a clear development plan in place. Staff are appropriately recruited, competent and qualified and receive good support through supervision, training and regular team meetings. This ensures they have opportunities to reflect on practice and contribute to the development of the service.

There is a clear Statement of Purpose that details the aims and functions of the agency. There are well-written children's guides available which were developed in consultation with the children and are available in different formats and languages. For children who's first language is not English, they have access to an interpreter throughout their placement, which ensures their needs can be fully met and their views and opinions sought.

The panel provides a robust function and ensures foster carers are approved where possible within timescales and children and young people are safeguarded. The panel has knowledgeable and experienced people who are competent to make recommendations. Decisions are clear and reflect the thorough process undertaken. The agency decision maker has not disagreed with any of the decisions which demonstrates the scrutiny which applications and reviews are undertaken. An age appropriate consultation form has been developed for children to make comments about their care which is part of the foster carers' review process. This is an excellent initiative and ensures children have their views heard.

There is a well-established monitoring system in place and the manager identifies trends and patterns. A quality assurance system has been introduced by the panel; which gives feedback to the agency on the quality of all reports presented. Therefore, the quality assurance is effective.

The recruitment of foster carers is rigorous. There is a comprehensive assessment process which ensures that carers are competent and suitable to undertake care of children. Foster carers receive extensive training. Carers say, 'The pre-approval training is comprehensive and prepared us well for the fostering task.' Foster carers have an excellent range of training available once they have been approved and carers work towards the Children's Workforce Development Council training. This helps them develop the skills required of them.

Support for foster carers and children placed is outstanding. The quality of care is monitored through regular supervision visits, yearly unannounced visits, reviews and informal support through telephone calls and emails. Foster carers say, 'They are always there to help and advise' and 'They give us excellent support and promote teamwork which gives great job satisfaction.' There is out-of-hours support which carers say, 'They respond quickly and are supportive.'

Since the agency was registered there has been a very small number of allegations made against carers. These have been fully investigated and resolved. The agency

has clear procedures in place and includes support for carers who may be subject to an investigation. The agency has good links to the local authority designated officer.

Records held by the fostering service are confidential and stored securely. They are well presented and are up-to-date, signed and dated. Carers keep good records and produce monthly reports which are comprehensive. In addition, if there are any incidents, forms are completed and forwarded to the agency and monitored by the manager.