

# Flying Colours Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC440078
<b>Inspection date</b>	24/05/2013
<b>Inspector</b>	David Morgan
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	Voluntary org placing children

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<b>Registered person</b>	Flying Colours Foster Care Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Deborah Jane Hamil
<b>Responsible individual</b>	James Davidson Hamil
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	04/10/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The agency is an independent fostering service whose offices are located in a rural area. The main aim of the service is to offer foster care placements to children and young people whose development has been impaired by abuse, trauma and neglect. There are currently 22 fostering households, 38 carers and 19 children and young people in placements.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

The last inspection found the service to be inadequate and made six requirements and seven recommendations; good progress has been made since then on the majority of issues.

Critical improvements have been made to the leadership team and the service is now operating at an adequate level overall with good outcomes for children and young people. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring that conflicts of interest are addressed so that all parties have confidence in the agency. There is also effective day-to-day management now, which ensures, for example, that safeguarding issues are addressed appropriately and that monitoring occurs regularly. Steady progress has also been made with the training of staff and carers. Further progress is required in areas such as implementing training on physical intervention, where it is required, to ensure the safety of all concerned. Written analyses of risks must be current in order to provide carers with appropriate guidance. There are also a number of other administrative issues to address that have less of a direct effect on carers and children.

Carers continue to feel pleased with the service they receive and the improvements that are now underway. They benefit from effective matching that leads to them developing positive relationships with children and young people and, consequently, placements are long-term. This is an important contribution to the significant

progress that most children and young people make and the positive views most of them hold.

## Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
13 (2011)	prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of restraint of children placed with foster parents (Regulation 13(1))	17/06/2013
13 (2011)	take all reasonable steps to ensure that no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable. This is with regard to risk assessments and safer caring policies being up to date (Regulation 13(2))	17/06/2013
27 (2011)	enter into a written agreement with carers covering the matters specified in Schedule 5. This is with regard to updating the agreements with any new terms of approval and the new training requirements (Regulation 27(5), Schedule 5)	29/07/2013
28 (2011)	ensure that if the fostering provider decides, taking into account any recommendation by the fostering panel, that the foster parent and the foster parent's household continue to be suitable, they must give written notice to the foster parent of their decision. This is with regard to decisions at all annual reviews being made by the decision maker. (Regulation 28(6))	01/07/2013

### Recommendations

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

- ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that the reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' on-going suitability to foster. This is with regard to demonstrating the competencies of each carer in a household (NMS 13.8)
- ensure foster carers maintain an on-going training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the

fostering service. This is with regard to each foster carer in fostering households (NMS 20.4)

- ensure the role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer. This is with regard to the supervision of support carers; the planning of supervision meetings, and developing carer's competencies and skills (NMS 21.7)
- ensure records are kept of complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken (NMS 21.11)
- ensure each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance, including the latest inspection framework (NMS 23.11)
- implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. This is also with regard to implementing a suitable dating protocol. (NMS 26.1)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children and young people make significant progress in most cases. They socialise effectively at home, in their schools and communities having overcome significant disadvantages in many cases. Several have achieved remarkable educational success, for example by representing their peers in school, and most are attaining at their expected levels. Wherever necessary, their needs arising from their cultural backgrounds are met and several are able to live with their siblings. Consequently, children and young people become socially integrated and able to address their emotional difficulties appropriately, often with the help of effective therapy and life story work.

Children and young people are very positive about their foster households. Nearly all are in long-term placements and they enjoy lasting relationships with their carers with very few unplanned endings. They anticipate the future positively and even young children are encouraged to make ambitious plans. Their confidence is also increased through pursuing active lifestyles with a clear link to community groups, sports and the arts. One said, 'My carers are kind, nice and caring; I have a lovely time.' Any health issues are addressed effectively and healthy lifestyles are practiced. This also contributes to children and young people's self-confidence, for example, when their dental health is returned to normal.

For most, minimal impact has been felt by the shortfalls identified in the previous inspection. A small proportion of households have decided to move to other fostering agencies but this has little direct effect on children and young people. Improvements have been made to ensure that the views of children and young people are obtained regularly. Supervising social workers also now ensure that children and young people are seen regularly and a minimum interval has been set. This increase in rigour helps

to ensure, for example, that any concerns they may have are identified promptly.

Children and carers have access to a complaints policy but they rarely feel the need to use it. Nevertheless, the manager now ensures that even low level concerns are considered as part of the complaints policy. This ensures that practices are improved wherever possible and lessons are learnt. Records are kept but are not assigned to a specific file, which makes implementation of the procedure and subsequent monitoring less effective. Also, the input of children and young people to the development of the service itself is, as yet, under-developed.

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

Satisfactory arrangements are now in place to ensure that the quality of the service meets the required standards. Recruitment and assessment processes have been at a low level since the last inspection. However, the new work that has been undertaken in these areas has been thorough. One applicant was particularly impressed with the emphasis, during the assessment, on the potential effects fostering may have on her own children. Matching arrangements are effective and ensure that each child's needs arising from their background, such as those arising from their culture or religion, are met.

One carer represented most when she said, 'We've always received brilliant support from the agency!' Carers receive regular visits and any gaps are usually addressed promptly; there is also frequent telephone communication. This helps to make carers feel less isolated. One carer said, 'There seems to be more structure now.' On the other hand, there is not a clear expectation yet about how often support carers are seen, for example, the partners of main carers. Also, the purpose of supervision meetings is not always clearly stated in records and such visits do not clearly develop carer's competencies and skills. These shortfalls mean that the opportunities provided by such meetings are not being used as effectively as possible. On the other hand, opportunities for carers to meet each other to provide important mutual support are now underway.

Good progress has been made to ensure that carers contribute as well as possible to children's placement plans and pathway plans. Careful consideration is given to the progress each child or young person makes and additional resources are brought to bear whenever required. All children and young people in each household are seen at regular intervals. Carers benefit significantly from the support of a psychologist who helps them devise strategies based on an understanding of individual behaviours. Further improvements are being trialled so that progress can be tracked more easily.

Significant improvements have also been made to the training of carers. An appropriate policy is in place and substantial progress has occurred in a short space of time to ensure that all core training and induction standards are completed in a timely way; this process will be completed within two months. Additionally, more advanced courses are also being used to develop individual carer's skills, which are

well received by carers. However, the minimum requirements of support carers need are not sufficiently clear in their development portfolios. This means that their personal developmental needs are not being assessed comprehensively and that their annual reviews are less evaluative than necessary. Foster carers have written terms of approval. However, these legal documents are not always updated when there are amendments.

Foster carer's first annual reviews are reviewed by panel, as required, and improvements are underway to expand the role of panel into subsequent reviews. Decision making at subsequent reviews is not undertaken by the agency decision maker. This means that the service is not benefitting as much as possible from the independence this process provides. On the other hand, applicants receive prompt information about decisions, which contributes to their positive impression of the agency. Panel has a high proportion of independent members who bring a wide range of skills. Panel members receive induction and appraisals but are not kept abreast of changes in legislation and guidance. This shortfall has had only marginal impact because of the small amount of work undertaken by panel.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Adequate arrangements are in place to ensure that children and young people are appropriately safeguarded. Policies and procedures have been improved recently and training for staff and carers is up to date. Children and young people feel safe in their foster homes; one said, 'I feel loved and safe.' There is prompt and effective communication with other agencies, too, and they have confidence in staff to alert them to any issues. Supervising social workers have improved the way they deal with safeguarding issues to ensure that action is taken promptly and that even minor issues are discussed. As a result, children and young people learn to keep themselves safe. Shortfalls remain, however, in the recording of some risk assessments and safer care plans. This means, for example, that the written guidance for some carers is less clear than necessary about risks posed by current and previous behaviours and issues relating to other children in the households. However, an administrative process is underway to ensure that these are brought up to date.

Communication inside the organisation has improved significantly, which provides a much more secure environment for making professional judgements and this is appreciated by staff. The responsible individual is ensuring that further clarity about roles and responsibilities is achieved between himself and the manager so that tasks and issues are addressed as effectively as possible.

There are few incidents of children and young people putting themselves at risk. The vast majority enjoy the stability provided by long-term placements and do not, for example, self-harm or go missing. However, for the small proportion of children and young people who may in the future present behaviours that require physical intervention there is insufficient guidance and training. Despite clear and open

communication about such issues, the potential risks to both carers and children are increased by this omission.

## **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

Effective steps have been taken to bring sufficient capacity and competence to the leadership team. An experienced person is now in post as non-executive director responsible for decision making and the supervision of the manager; she also provides staff with a semi-independent means of raising concerns about the manager or the responsible individual. There is also a new Registered Manager who has improved staff morale and provides strong support to carers.

The professional development of all office staff has improved, with staff taking-up opportunities to pursue relevant training courses. Their motivation has also been improved by having regular supervision, appraisals and team meetings. Foster carers recognise their improved motivation, which is necessary to move the service forwards.

The manager and responsible individual have approached the shortfalls identified during the last full inspection in an honest and open way; this has been appreciated by carers and other professionals. Commissioners report that they are kept up to date with the implementation of the action plan. Requirements and recommendations have been prioritised and improvements implemented in light of the long-term needs of the service, not just the pressing need to show progress. In particular, attention has been paid to safeguarding issues; carers' training and annual reviews, and dealing with any conflicts of interest. On the other hand, the large amount of change as well as new notifiable incidents, have led to slower progress than planned in some areas. This is particularly evident in record keeping, which remains unsatisfactory despite steps to address the shortfalls.

A new monitoring system is being routinely used by the manager along with regular use of feedback documents. These steps mean that the manager knows how well the service is proceeding. Patterns and trends are used to plan the new direction of improvements.



## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.