

# Integrated Fostering Services Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	06/05/2010

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Integrated Fostering Services Ltd. is an independent fostering agency owned and operated by a private limited company.

The agency provides: short term; long term; bridging to adoption; rehabilitation; emergency; and parent and child foster placements for children.

At the time of inspection, the agency employs 51 carers providing placements to 62 children.

### 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 **good**.

An independent reviewing officer observes that carers have, 'good outcomes as a focus'. A social worker feels the carers are, 'Doing excellent work with children.' A child says their progress is, 'Better as a result of this foster home.' Carers find the 'support and matching very good' or 'exceptional'.

The agency are mindful of matching considerations when looking at potential placements to help promote placement stability. There were three unplanned endings in 2011-12 affecting three children. As a proportion, this equates to 4% of all the children placed which is lower than the comparators of all independent fostering agencies at 9%. In 2012-13 there were only two unplanned endings which is another improvement, due to better matching. As a result, children are increasingly settled in their foster families.

Outcomes for children are good; they attend school regularly and try new activities and interests. Some make remarkable progress in improved self-esteem and confidence. The service is of good quality. An established panel assures the quality of prospective carers through scrutiny of assessments. Safeguarding is strong, with prompt referral of any concerns so that action may be taken. Incidents of children going missing has significantly reduced, promoting children's safety.

Leadership and management are adequate. Staff and carers find management

approachable and available to them with ready support. Shortfalls highlighted by the inspection are mostly in the area of leadership and management.

Areas for improvement highlighted by the inspection are largely around the accuracy and analysis of records, which do not impact directly on children's care. Not all the required information is provided to adults and children including about complaints. Pathway plans are not always obtained for eligible children. Details of the circumstances of a child's return are not always recorded. Refresher training in first aid for some carers is overdue. Although recruitment checks are robust, an additional check on reference requests will further improve this.

The agency has highlighted increasing the diversity of its carers and panel members and further involving children in running the agency in its development plan.

## 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
3 (2011)	make sure the written statement in relation to the fostering service ('the Statement of Purpose') consists of a statement as to the services and facilities including any parent and child arrangements provided by the fostering service (Regulation 3 (1) (b))	31/08/2013
3 (2011)	ensure the children's guide to the fostering service includes-a summary of the Statement of Purpose and a summary of the representations and complaints procedure established, in the case of an independent fostering service, under Regulation 18(1) and the email address of the Chief Inspector (Regulation 3 (3) (a) (b) (1) (c))	31/08/2013
18 (2011)	ensure that the complaints procedure provides for an opportunity for informal resolution of the complaint at an early stage and that the complaints procedure is clear to understand. (Regulation 18 (2) (a))	31/07/2013

### Recommendations

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

- include in written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing the circumstances of a child's return (NMS 5.10)

- provide foster carers with sufficient training in first aid, with specific reference to ensuring refresher training is done in a timely way (NMS 6.7)
- ensure foster carers contribute to the development of each 'eligible' child's pathway plan and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan (NMS 12.2)
- ensure written minutes of panel meetings are accurate, with specific reference to ensuring language is clear in all areas (NMS 14.7)
- ensure the children's guide includes how a child can contact Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, with particular reference to updating contact details and ensuring all information in the document is clear for children to understand (NMS 16.4)
- ensure references include where possible a statement from each referee as to their opinion of the person's suitability to work with children. (NMS 19.3 (d))

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children feel that they are treated as 'one of the family' in their foster placements. They feel settled and more secure emotionally, forming trusting bonds with their foster families. Children receive some information about the families they are going to live with before the placement, which helps them to know what to expect when they move in. Children say they are 'made welcome' and 'helped to unpack and belong' to reduce their anxiety about moving in to live with a new family.

Some children achieve exceptional outcomes, for example, in improved self-confidence and self-esteem. They experience an improved physical appearance and levels of hygiene, which helps their confidence when mixing with others and forming friendships, participating in school and trying new activities and hobbies. Babies make progress in their development and general wellbeing, including those with special and complex needs.

Children experience increased independence, learning how to do things for themselves and take responsibility. One said: 'I go out on my own now.' They learn useful skills whatever their age or ability to help them do things for themselves, for example, preparing meals, doing laundry or managing money. Children participate in a wide range of purposeful activities, for example, swimming, drama clubs, dancing and playing team sports. Those children with disabilities access opportunities in the community, for example, work experience and suitable training courses, to ensure their full participation. Children benefit from holidays with their foster families, including travelling abroad and experiencing different cultures.

Most children benefit from remaining in stable placements. Some children experience a positive move back to live with their birth families. Some children stay with their carers beyond the age of eighteen, in supported-lodging arrangements. This ensures

that they experience continuous support into their early adulthood from carers they have come to know and trust. Those children who move on to adoption do so from the experience of secure relationships with their carers. Continued links with their carers helps make their transition to their adoptive families a positive experience. Children are placed with their brothers and sisters where this is appropriate, so benefit from the continuity of this family relationship; this includes large groups of siblings.

Children enjoy general good health. They participate in healthy eating and exercise to support their good health. They access general and specialist health services to keep themselves well, taking increasing responsibility for their own health and medical appointments. Children with disabilities make good progress in achieving better health outcomes, for example, in eating a wider variety of foods, improved hygiene or toileting behaviour, or experiencing improved sleep patterns. Children have an understanding of key health risks, such as obesity, smoking and drug use. For the vast majority, such risk taking behaviour decreases, with resulting improvements to their health. A very small minority continue to engage in risky behaviour; they are supported, for example, with links to appropriate organisations and the provision of information, to try to help them commit to making changes to improve their health.

All children of school age attend school or other educational provision, with very regular attendance. Educational achievement is good for the majority of children, with some making exceptional progress from their starting point at the time of placement, for example, by achieving GCSE qualifications, moving into mainstream education, discovering sporting talents, or finding courses which suit their special needs. This improves their options for further or higher education, or their employment prospects. Children say they are helped to 'have aspirations' with some now aiming higher and considering the choice of university or a professional career in the future.

Children are consulted about all areas of their lives. The agency makes sure their views are listened to, for example at reviews or education planning meetings. Children regularly give their views on how the service is run to the agency's supervising social workers, via questionnaires and by representation on a recently established steering group. They also benefit from meeting others in foster care and from the activities the agency provides three times a year, for example at Christmas celebrations.

## **Quality of service**

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

A range of skilled foster carers of varied backgrounds are recruited to meet children's needs. The agency recognises the need to recruit more carers of an Asian background to provide more placement options for those looking to place children of this background. Improved matching has contributed to placement stability, so children experience few moves. Carers value the support they receive when

placements are not an exact match to them and their family, for example, in terms of ethnicity. Carers show ability and commitment to meeting children's individual needs.

Carers feel that they are part of a team working with children's best interests at heart and are respected by the agency. Placing authorities and associated professionals have a high regard for the agency's staff and carers. Some carers describe the agency's support as 'exceptional'. There is good quality support when carers need help out of office hours. Carers appreciate the 'personal touch' when they contact the agency and that whoever they speak to knows them and their family well; this helps them feel valued and part of a team.

The recruitment, preparation and assessment of foster carers is good. Carers value the agency's recognition that fostering affects all their family members and that there is a need to balance the needs of family members and the fostered child. Carers find the assessments 'necessarily thorough' and are well-prepared for being presented to panel. The well-led panel fulfils a quality assurance function in scrutinising assessments and making recommendations to the agency's decision makers which are child-focussed. The panel update their skills and knowledge through suitable training. The panel Chair identifies how panel may improve in their annual report, for example, by increasing the diversity of panel members in terms of gender.

Carers find their training useful and relevant. Training equips carers with the skills they need to support children, although refresher training in first aid is overdue for some. Carers value highly the support group meetings where carers can share ideas and experiences and informal learning takes place.

The agency is responsive in delivering training relevant to children's changing needs. Carers feel that there is continuous support and information to help them work with children and understand how behaviour may be influenced by previous experiences. An independent reviewing officer finds the carers are committed to providing good care to the children they foster. They say carers are understanding of children's previous experiences and the impact this may have on behaviour, emotional wellbeing, progress and so on, commenting, 'Carers recognise what a traumatic experience it has been for the children.'

Additional support has helped enhance the quality and stability of placements, for example, children's education is sustained by the provision of transport where children in a foster family attend more than one school. This helps to minimise disruption to children's education and protects their established relationships in school.

Carers value the good working relationships they have with the agency's supervising social workers. They find them supportive and professional, working in the best interests of children, describing their approach as 'quite strict but human!' At times, the agency's social workers perform over and above their role, performing some of the tasks of the placing authority social workers. For example, sometimes children ask them to attend hospital appointments with them and their carer. Children

describe the supervising social workers as, 'really nice' and that they, 'come to the house to talk to me.' Placing authorities and associated professionals find the agency's contribution to planning children's care very useful, particularly as most meetings also include a representative of the management team.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

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

Children say they feel safe in their foster homes. They say their carers make sure that they are safe and teach them how to keep themselves safe, for example they know what to do in the event of a fire. They feel that they are helped to be safe when out in the community, for example, by gaining an awareness of 'stranger danger' or learning how to negotiate traffic safely. They understand the types of bullying which can occur and that bullying is something they should never tolerate. Children say they feel safe from bullying and this has not been raised as an issue during the inspection.

Unannounced visits to foster carers are made more frequently than twice a year to make sure that fostering households continue to provide a safe environment for children. Innovative practise of allocated supervising social workers 'swapping' the carers they usually support when household checks are due, helps provide a 'fresh pair of eyes' to look closely at the home and make sure it remains safe for children.

Carers confidently implement procedures to report children missing to try to bring about their safe return. They support the police in their search for any child who goes missing, for example, by providing a recent photo and a description of their clothing. Since the last inspection three years ago, there have been times when the incidents and frequency of children going missing has been high compared to all independent fostering agencies. However, in significant contrast, during 2012-13 one child has been reported missing so children are much safer. The agency regards improved systems for matching and increasing placement stability for bringing about this improvement. Records kept of incidents of children going missing do not always include the circumstances of a child's return.

Staff and carers take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously; through supervision and training the message to report any concerns or allegations is reinforced. Swift action is taken to protect children and support carers while any allegation is investigated. It is the expectation of staff that carers are expected to, 'Protect the child, themselves and their family.'

The recruitment and vetting of staff and carers working for the service is very thorough and protects children. Detailed employment histories are obtained to ensure prospective staff have suitable experience and qualifications in order to support and train carers. Suitable references are obtained and verified. Although referees are asked about child protection concerns, they are not asked explicitly if they have any concerns about the candidate working with children. There is a detailed approach at the assessment stage to ensure that carers and their

households are safe, then on-going checks to make sure they continue to be so, which helps to protect children.

Children know how to complain, referring to a range of people and organisations they could complain to both inside and outside the agency. Carers are supplied with a copy of the complaints procedure and are familiar with this, although recorded complaints are low. However, the complaints procedure does not provide an opportunity for informal resolution of the complaint at an early stage and the complaints procedure is not entirely clear to understand.

## **Leadership and management**

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

Both staff and carers find management very approachable. Management demonstrate vision for the service and ambition for the children placed with its carers. Partnership working with children's social workers, school staff, health professionals and so on is a strength of the agency.

The Registered Manager has achieved a relevant management qualification since the last inspection and he and the management team update their skills and knowledge through training.

The staff team engender confidence. The service employs sufficient, qualified staff; this is reflected in the frequency and quality of support and supervision that carers receive. The agency retains staff who are creative in their work with carers and children. They have good opportunities for personal development, supervision and training. Communication within the staff team and with carers is effective so that all are informed about how children's placements are progressing.

The agency is adequately resourced. The responsible individual, who has a business background, provides a useful oversight of financial matters to ensure children's needs can be met and that any disruptions to their care or placement are avoided.

Although the agency does seek children's views about the running of the service, it identifies in its development plan that this is an area to improve. Some placing authorities would like more activities provided for children during holidays where they could have opportunities to meet others in foster care.

In some areas, the agency's record keeping is weak. Although managers make appropriate notifications following significant events, these, as well as other documents including the manager's monitoring reports, lack sufficient analysis and detail. Also, although panel minutes provide an accurate record of the panel's business, in a few places the language is not sufficiently clear. Not all policies contain the information required by regulation; the complaints procedure does not provide for an opportunity for informal resolution of the complaint at an early stage and is not entirely clear to understand. Children's files do not always contain all the

required information, but the agency takes steps to obtain most of this from placing authorities. However, a few children who are eligible to have a pathway plan do not always have these in place.

The agency provides a Statement of Purpose to stakeholders so they know what to expect from the service. This includes the range of fostering placements provided but does not detail the arrangements for parent and child placements.

Children receive attractive children's guides which are written for various age groups. However, these do not include a summary of the Statement of Purpose or the complaints procedure as required by regulation. They also do not include the current contact details for Ofsted. Nonetheless, these shortfalls do not currently appear to have an impact on children as carers help them to understand the service and children say they are confident about how to make a complaint. In addition to the children's guides, the service provides very useful booklets to help inform children and keep them safe, for example, on what to do about bullying or about how to keep safe when they are away from their foster homes on holiday.

The service has not always demonstrated a capacity to improve by meeting regulations set at the previous full inspection and at a subsequent visit. However, these regulations are now met.

## 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.