

FosterCare UK

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

FosterCare UK Limited is an independent fostering agency offering family placements for a range of children and young people from birth to 18 years of age. A limited number of parent and child placements are approved by the agency. In January 2013, FosterCare UK Ltd had 37 foster carers with 44 children placed.

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**.

This inspection was originally carried out between 4 and 11 February 2013. A second visit to the service's head office was undertaken between 25 and 27 June 2013. This was to supplement evidence gathered during the original inspection.

Sound assessments of carers are presented to an effective panel made up of members with wide ranging and valuable experiences. Minutes of panel meetings now reflect comprehensive discussion and evaluation that informs the recommendations made. Furthermore, recent changes in practice now ensure transparency and independence in the decision making process.

Young people are placed with carers following robust assessment and matching processes. The preparation, training and supervision of carers provides them to learn and develop the skills to provide care to meet the individual needs of young people. Carers relish the opportunities provided to improve the quality of care they provide.

Outcomes for young people are positive and young people attend school regularly and make real achievements in their education. Carers promote this well and advocate strongly for young people to ensure their specific needs are recognised and met. Consequently, young people are successfully supported and guided to ensure they benefit from their learning and education. Numbers of permanently excluded children from school is exceptionally low against the national average.

Young people also benefit from well managed healthcare and routine medical check-

ups. Carers demonstrate a sense of commitment and appropriate ownership of their responsibilities to support young people. Young people know that carers value them and care about their healthcare and lifestyle choices. This results in healthy living being effectively promoted and young people enjoying more healthy lifestyles.

Leadership and management are effective and a strong commitment to improve is communicated to carers and staff. Information systems are used well to monitor the progress of young people. However, the Registered Manager's system for reviewing the quality of care does not make clear links to improvements are to be made or consultation with key young people. Similarly, the views of young people are not currently incorporated into the appraisals of all staff who work with them. While this inspection highlighted examples of significant events not being notified to Ofsted, the care provided to individual young people was not affected, resulting in limited impact to them. However, managers responded immediately to improve practice within the agency.

Some improvements to matching procedures are recommended. Matching considerations for some parent and child placements lack clarity. In a separate case, the appropriate procedures were not followed when a child was placed outside the approved age range of their carers.

A detailed training programme is promoted by the agency annually. Carers are encouraged to continually reflect upon their learning and personal development. However, some time-limited qualifications obtained by carers are allowed to lapse. While some carers are extremely effective in preparing young people for independence, this work is not planned consistently or effectively.

However, outcomes for young people are consistently good and have been sustained. There is much evidence of effective practice in a range of activities; unplanned placement endings are rare and fall far below the national average. Young people have progressed as a result of the services and care that they receive. The identified shortfalls have not had a significantly negative impact on young people, but weaknesses in some systems introduce the potential for this to occur.

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
35 (2011)	maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency which provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authorities (Regulation 35 (1)(b) and	02/08/2013

	(3))	
36 (2011)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))	19/07/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes (NMS 3.8)
- ensure that foster carers receive sufficient training on health and hygiene issues, in particular ensure that first aid training is kept up to date (NMS 6.7)
- ensure there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence (NMS 12.3)
- ensure that the fostering service only suggest foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs, in particular with regard to parent and child placements (NMS 15.1)
- ensure that where staff are working with children, their annual appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 24.6)
- ensure that other than in an emergency, a child is only placed with a foster carer whose terms of approval match the child's circumstances, although in an emergency a child may be placed for up to 6 working days with any foster carer who has been approved under the 2011 Regulations. (Children Act 1989; Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4, paragraph 3.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people say they can influence their care and the fostering agency by voicing their individual opinions and views. Young people feel that their carers listen to them and value their opinions. Carers confirm that young people are encouraged to express their views, enabling them to be involved in day to day decisions. Young people benefit from more formal opportunities to influence the agency and their care using surveys and questionnaires that the agency provides.

Young people say that they are made to feel part of the family in their foster placements. They enjoy a range of opportunities and receive support that they would expect from living within a family. Young people say that they are respected and

understand their rights to privacy and are encouraged to express themselves.

Young people benefit from stable and enduring placements as unplanned endings to placements are rare. Young people are well supported by carers who understand and meet their diverse individual needs. When gaps in carers' knowledge are identified, additional training is provided to ensure carers are equipped appropriately. Consequently, young people make good attachments with carers, who are trained, skilled and motivated to support them.

Young people benefit from having their routine and more individual health needs met effectively. The agency and the carers oversee all health interventions and as a result all young people's health is well maintained. Young people are supported with more specialist health interventions which are planned along with their placing authority.

Young people benefit from regular school attendance which has improved significantly in many cases. There are examples where young people with very poor levels of attendance, have since placement, attended far beyond the expectation of their placement plan. When necessary carers advocate strongly for young people to ensure they receive the education services they need and are entitled to. External professionals confirm that the agency works closely with them to improve educational outcomes for young people.

The educational achievement of young people is good, taking into account progress made from their starting points at the time of placement. The educational outcomes of young people are promoted by carers who celebrate young people's achievements by displaying certificates and awards in the foster home. This support and encouragement from carers promotes the continuation of young people's learning and achievement.

Young people enjoy a range of typical family activities and pastimes within their placements. They are actively encouraged to find a hobby or pursuit within the wider community, to make friends and mix with her peers. Local youth clubs and sporting hobbies provide good experiences for young people. This encourages them to gain confidence and a sense of individuality. Young people confirm that they have opportunities to go out on their own and meet friends with appropriate levels of independence granted to give them the time and space to do this.

Young people are encouraged by their carers to learn skills of independence that they will need for adulthood. However, this is largely an informal process and not consistently planned. A recent development results in the opportunity for a clear audit of skills to be undertaken. However, this does not directly link to an organised process to identify how carers will help young people develop their confidence or skills. Similarly the progress young people make in this regard is not captured effectively.

Quality of service

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

Young people benefit from being looked after by foster carers who are recruited from a range of differing cultures and backgrounds. More opportunities are therefore available for young people to be placed with carers that match or are similar to their own culture.

Foster carers are equipped and supported to meet the diverse needs of young people. Carers are extremely positive about the learning and development opportunities provided by the agency. One said, 'Training is endless; I just love it.' Others say that the training and guidance provided gives them the best opportunity to understand and meet the needs of the young people in their care. Individual carers maintain reflective training logs which are shared with supervising social workers to explore how their practice is developed as a result of their learning.

Formal supervision is also valued by carers who say that this provides insight and raises awareness about their caring role. Consequently, young people are looked after by carers who understand their needs and are able to use training and support to reflect on and improve the care they provide.

The fostering panel meets regularly to address the agency's obligations and makes timely recommendations. Following recent improvements, accurate minutes now effectively reflect detailed consideration of carer's skills and attributes. Panel members bring a range of background knowledge and experience to panel discussions. The development of individual panel members, including the chair, is addressed through regular training and an annual appraisal. Regular meetings between the panel chair and senior management of the agency drive improvements in practice and the quality of assessments. A change in the agency's decision maker has the effect of removing a potential conflict of interests. This now ensures that there is clear demarcation of roles within the agency and there is transparency in regard to the decisions made about carers.

Carers demonstrate commitment and dedication to young people, passionately advocating for them when necessary. Young people have been particularly well supported with their education and health through the efforts and perseverance of their carers. The views of foster carers are actively sought and significantly contribute to the planning and review of young people's care. This ensures that young people are cared for in line with placement plans that are current and realistic.

Foster carers consistently complete the Childcare Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training standards in a timely manner. Where carers experience difficulties in achieving this managers and staff are aware of the situation and pro-actively provide support to remove any blocks or challenges. However, some time-limited training courses are not scheduled consistently to ensure that qualifications remain up to date. For example, formal techniques for de-escalating or managing difficult behaviours and first aid courses are arranged after previous certificates have expired.

Well managed matching and assessment of young people with carers results in young people rarely experiencing disruption and breakdowns in placement. However,

one example was identified when a child was placed outside the age range for which their carers were approved. While this was undertaken for sound reasons, the correct procedure for changing the approval of the carers was not followed in line with statutory guidance. Similarly, matching considerations for some parent and child placements lack clarity, meaning that the agency is not able to effectively demonstrate how particular carers are able to meet needs specific to this type of placement.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Carers and young people are aware of rights children have to be protected from bullying, abuse and discrimination. Young people say that their carers support and help them to feel confident and express any concerns or dissatisfaction. Young people benefit from being supported and confident of their rights.

When necessary, young people are further assisted by independent advocates, who are provided at their request or by carers on their behalf. Therefore, young people are assisted to access appropriate links to external support services to ensure their voices are heard.

Young people are supported when they are worried or have any concerns and this minimises young people going missing or becoming absent. As a result, young people are well looked after by carers who understand when they need more support and guidance. The runaway and missing from home and care protocol is understood by the agency which has put clear procedures in place. While it is uncommon for young people to go missing, carers fully understand the expectations placed upon them when this does happen. Carers take swift and appropriate action to safeguard and protect young people through the deployment of effective searching, reporting and subsequent recovery. Individual carers and the agency have made good links with police missing person officers to share information and promote an effective response when necessary.

To ensure young people are provided with consistent and appropriate guidance all foster carers receive mandatory training in key areas of care. When the assessment of individual young people's needs identifies a requirement for additional or more specialist training, this is provided promptly by the agency. This ensures that young people's needs are understood and met by carers who are skilled and insightful.

Furthermore, when additional individual needs emerge subsequent to a placement, the agency ensures that the placing social worker, the carer and all other parties are engaged in agreeing the support required. In this way young people benefit by having their needs assessed and addressed by the effective development of the carer's skills and the placement expectations.

To further protect young people the agency and the carers maintain well-managed procedures to deploy should a young person make any allegation or there is any

suspicion of abuse. A separate complaints procedure is also in place. Details of this are outlined within the young people's guides and are understood by young people who say they are aware of how to complain or make representation. Consequently, young people benefit from understanding their rights to be well cared for and how to make themselves heard if they have any concerns.

Similarly, young people are aware of their rights to be protected and safeguarded by their carers. The young people's guides make this clear and provide advice and details of key persons and agencies, should they wish to obtain independent advice. Young people stated that they are aware of their rights and how to get help and support should they need it.

Young people are protected by robust recruitment procedures and practices that are consistently applied for new staff, panel members and carers. Once approved, all carers receive a minimum of one unannounced visit each year. Where specific issues or areas for improvement are identified such visits are considerably more frequent. This supports the agency to obtain a clear view of the quality of care provided by individual carers. Any unannounced visit is in addition to planned monthly support visits.

Leadership and management

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

This agency was last inspected in November 2008 when the overall effectiveness of the agency was found to be good. Three recommendations were made. The manager was asked to ensure that they were qualified in their role as manager. Since that inspection, a new manager has been appointed with all appropriate qualifications to act within this role. A new children's guide has now been published. This is in two distinct formats; one for younger children in a colourful, child-friendly format and a more detailed, formal version produced at the request of older children. A system for monitoring young people's statutory reviews has been introduced and reviews are now automatically chased should they be delayed. With more timely review reports staff and foster carers are now able to implement and expedite plans and arrangements, advantaging young people's care.

Leaders and managers build strong and effective relationships with placing authorities and external agencies. In particular, positive links have been made with partner organisations, such as virtual school heads and the looked after children's nurse. As a result, young people benefit from being supported in their education, health and day-to-day care, by the active development of services and support.

The agency monitors young people's progress within their placement following the matching process. The matching and placement reviews ensure that both the broader and presenting needs of the young person are met, along with the more diverse and individual needs. The regular supervision of carers provides them with an effective forum to both communicate their views and develop their skills. Young people are supported by carers who are supervised, trained and guided to meet their

more complex needs.

To further develop services for young people, the agency regularly puts on conferences for all carers, staff and panel members to focus on specific outcomes for young people. The latest events have addressed specific health outcomes and emotional resilience. The agency contributed to recent research relating to young people's resilience in foster care and the resilience of foster care placements. The conference outlined the results of the research with a view to developing the skills of foster carers and services provided by the agency. This initiative promotes learning and development of the service which is benefiting and supporting young people.

The foster carers' charter has been adopted by the agency. Clear communication is shared with all carers in writing. This is supported by discussion and debate at support meetings. Work is on-going to fully embed the charter within practice, specifically in relation to delegated decision making.

Leaders and managers consistently communicate and evidence a clear desire for improvement that drives progress. The agency carries out periodic review and assessment of its practices and the services provided to meet the differing needs of young people. This leads to stable and enduring placements. The agency is committed to improving and developing the services offered and this opinion is reflected by both the carers and partner agencies.

Leaders and managers frequently seek to compare the efficacy of their services in comparison with different national standards. Various awards have been obtained from external bodies. One such award praised the way in which the agency engaged with young people and promoted participation. However, the agency recognises that more can be done. For example, while the views of young people inform the annual reviews of their carers, they are not sought to contribute to the annual appraisals of supervising social workers or other staff who work directly with young people.

The Registered Manager conducts monthly monitoring of the quality of care and the operation of the service. However, while monitoring of all expected matters is maintained, it is not clear what action, if any, is taken to improve the quality of care provided by the fostering agency. Similarly, it is not apparent that any consultation with young people, carers or placing authorities contributes to these regular reviews of the quality of care. The impact of these shortfalls upon young people is limited, however one requirement and a recommendation are made to further promote improvement in the services to young people.

This inspection highlighted two examples where the inspector considered significant events should have been notified to Ofsted. Leaders and managers outlined their rationale for not forwarding these notifications through a literal interpretation of the wording of legislation relevant to these events. However, they took immediate action to change their practice and procedures. A further requirement is made to ensure continued consistency in meeting regulatory requirements.

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.