

Select FosterCare Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Ms Jacobs-Walls
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Date of last inspection N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Select FosterCare Services Ltd is an independent fostering agency that registered with Ofsted in August 2013. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for individual and sibling group placement, emergency and short and long term placements. The company comprises of two directors whose roles include Responsible Individual and the agency decision-maker.

The agency's statement of purpose identifies one of the service's key aims as 'to enable and ensure that looked after children's physical, emotional and health needs are met to promote positive, rewarding experiences of childhood'

The agency's offices are situated in Wanstead, adjacent to a golf course. At the time of the inspection the fostering agency had 7 approved fostering households with 2 children/young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

This fostering service registered with Ofsted in August 2013 and this is the service's first inspection since registration. The fostering service has made a positive start in meeting the placement needs for children and young people. The service provides adequate quality of care, the outcomes for children and young people are very positive. They have developed strong attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. They develop good self-esteem and self-

confidence. Looked after children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs and they are cared for safely. The service pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity.

Safeguarding practice is at the heart of this fostering agency. There are clear procedures and systems in place to assist in keeping children and young people safe. Risk assessments and safe caring plans are completed. These ensure that children and young people's welfare is promoted and that they are kept safe.

Children and young people's health and education needs are well met by the service. They feel listened to by the service and their carers and they enjoy safe contact with their families and friends. Children and young people have good opportunities to take part in leisure activities they enjoy.

The fostering agency provides good support and supervision to foster carers. They feel valued and appreciate the investment the agency has made in them to promote positive outcomes for children and young people.

The leadership and management of the fostering service are satisfactory and changes in personnel to the current management structure are imminent. The current supervising social worker and the team manager are both qualified and experienced social workers, who have backgrounds in child care, child protection and the fostering task. The current management roles are untenable and additional staff are being recruited to remedy this situation. The fostering service provides all interested parties with detailed information about the service and facilities provided, Managers ensure that all key policies are in place; safeguarding policies and procedures in particular, are clear and comprehensive.

This inspection notes some areas for improvement. The function and operation of the fostering panel is not strong and monitoring systems are not sufficiently effective in highlighting the service's strengths and weaknesses. Foster carers' written assessments are not consistently of a high quality and training opportunities for foster carers needs further development. The fostering service is yet to implement effective foster carer recruitment strategies to help meet the aims of the service. The service does not routinely contact referees to verify written references and efforts to obtain the views and opinions of looked after children to inform service development is yet to be established.

Areas of 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.

Requirement	Due date
26: Assessment of prospective foster parents. Ensure written assessments to assess foster carers' suitability are carried out in accordance with regulation 26 (Regulation 26(1) (2)&(3))	01/10/2015
17: Support, training and information for foster parents. Provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interest of children placed with them (Regulation 17.1)	01/10/2015
23: Constitution and membership of fostering panel. Ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel (Regulation 23.7)	01/10/2015
35: Review of quality of care. Maintain a system for – (a) monitoring matters set out in schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency (Regulation 35(a)&(b))	01/10/2015
35: Review of quality of care. Ensure any report under regulation 35 provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(3))	01/10/2015

*These requirements are subject to a statutory requirement notice.

Recommendations

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

ensure children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns. In particular that the role of the 'Children's Champion' is established (NMS 1.5)

implement an effective strategy to ensure there are sufficient numbers of foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service (NMS 13.1)

ensure foster carers able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)

ensure the panel provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on quality of reports being presented to panel (NMS 14.2)

ensure all necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration (NMS 14.2)

ensure telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written reference (NMS 19.1)

ensure managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the

lines of accountability, are clearly defined. (NMS 25.4)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people have positive experiences and make good, steady progress while in placement. They are well cared for by their foster families who understand their identified needs and how best these needs can be met. Children and young people have a strong sense of attachment with their foster families. A local authority social worker comments in statutory review report, 'X is doing really well. He is flourishing in all aspects of his life. X's confidence and self-esteem are also flourishing and he is becoming a kind, caring young person'. Children and young people clearly develop a secure and strong sense of belonging with their foster families; they routinely enjoy family holidays and special occasions. One young person comments of his foster family, 'They give me love and protect my life.....there's nothing else to tell, I like everything'.

Children and young people are cared for in accordance with written care plans, which are kept updated. They feel well listened to and have opportunities to participate in placement decision-making. For example, young people make choices with regards to their preferred areas of study and careers paths and whether or not to continue to have contact with their birth parents. Children and young people routinely attend look after children's reviews and are supported by their foster carers and staff of the agency to participate fully in these meetings. This assists their understanding of decision-making and planning for their current and future care.

Children and young people have opportunities to express their wishes and feelings. For example the supervising social worker regularly meets with children and young people in private to gain their opinion on a range of matters, including placement progress and they are encouraged to participate with foster carers' annual reviews. The effective advocacy of children and young people is an area identified for improvement. The service is yet to fully develop a role identified in the agency's statement of purpose as the 'Children's Champion', an in-house advocate for looked after children in placement. The post-holder would more efficiently and independently provide children and young people with alternative options for sharing their views. Looked after children receive clear information about making complaints. Children and young people say they have no cause to make any complaints and there have been no reported complaints made against the service by a looked after child or any other stakeholder.

Young people receive and have access to information about their potential foster families prior to placement start. This is useful in preparing young people for their new families and assists them to settle quickly.

Children and young people remain in stable placements for as long as their needs continue to be met. Where this is not the case, appropriate, alternative placements are promptly identified and the transition is managed sensitively.

Children and young people engage in a range of physical and social activities that are

of their choosing. These typically include sport, particularly football and attendance at local gyms. These activities assist children and young people to enjoy a healthy lifestyle and good opportunities for play.

Children and young people live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and social well-being is well promoted. They have good access to primary health care services and receive advice and support from specialist services where this is required. In relation to their emotional health, children and young people also have access to and make use of mental health professionals such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for on-going support and counselling. Their physical health care needs are well met by the service. Young people and children enjoy well-balanced, nutritious diets, which meet their cultural needs. Their religious and spiritual needs are also met, with some choosing to attend identified places of worship. The fostering service does not currently care for any child or young person living with a disability. However the service has on its staff team a specialist consultant who has extensive experience of training and working within the disability field.

All children and young people are engaged in learning activities. They have very good school attendance and are making significant educational progress from their original starting points. Children and young make good progress as a result of their foster carers' very keen interest and involvement in their education attainment. Foster carers are confident in meeting the educational needs of children and young people and are supported in this task by the supervising social worker. Children and young people clearly benefit academically from this input and for some, their learning outcomes are excellent.

Older young people are well prepared for adulthood. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and fostering services staff that help prepare them to manage their lives more independently. Young people have the opportunity to explore and develop skills focussed on healthy eating, budgeting, household chores and their own self-care. A local authority social worker says of a young person's development, 'He has developed independent skills. He's now able to travel independently, able to cook, clean his room, tidy up, put on a washing machine and dishwasher'. This skill development is clearly to the benefit of older young people in preparing them for adulthood. The fostering service has in place clear 'Staying Put' policies to support former looked after children remain in their existing foster care placements, if they so wish.

Children and young people are generally well behaved and risk taking behaviour reduces the longer the placement continues. Where there are instances of poor or undesired behaviour, children and young people take responsibility for their actions. For example, children are routinely encouraged to verbally apologise and where appropriate, offer written apologies. Where significant risks are posed, for example, the use of illegal substances, foster carers together with staff of the fostering service and other involved professionals offer support and advice to help curb risk-taking behaviour.

Children and young people enjoy access to their parents, brothers and sisters in

accordance with local authority directions and when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering service ensures that contact arrangements are adhered to by foster carers. This is to ensure that children and young people maintain a sense of their heritage and promotes a positive sense of identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The fostering service currently has 7 approved fostering households. The service is yet to develop and implement a clear and effective recruitment strategy to attract and secure a larger pool of foster carers. This is important if the service is to meet its stated aim to provide foster care placements that meet the diverse needs of looked after children. At the time of the inspection there are a number of foster care assessments underway. The service is yet to approve foster carers able to provide specialist remand foster care placements or placements for children living with disabilities as outlined in the service's statement of purpose. Further expansion of the agency's pool of approved foster carers will better enable the fostering service to meet the diverse needs of the looked after children it seeks to serve.

Children and young people are carefully matched to their foster placements ensuring that individual needs are identified clearly and met. The agency ensures the placing authority provides comprehensive information to help them and the foster carers make the most appropriate placements. Foster carers are very much involved in this process. The fostering agency works with the child's social worker and Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure statutory reviews are convened within specified timescales, and that care plans and placement plans are regularly reviewed. No issues are identified in relation to delegated authority.

The preparation of potential foster carers is good. Initial enquiries are promptly responded to and they are provided with good information about the application and assessment process. Applicants are required to attend preparatory training 'Skills to Foster' workshops, which approved foster carers say is comprehensive and offers good insight into the role and responsibilities of the foster carer.

The assessment of potential foster carers is identified as an area for improvement. The agency recruits independent social workers to complete foster care assessments. While these staff members indicate that support and supervision of this piece of work is good, some written assessments are not consistently comprehensive, analytical and do not clearly identify the competencies and strengths foster carers have or need to develop. Some foster carer assessments are very descriptive and are ambiguous about the recommended terms of approval. This is important to ensure that the fostering panel has full and comprehensive information to make informed recommendations about potential foster carers, including their ability to care safely for children and young people.

The fostering service's support of foster carers is good. Foster carers indicate this is a key strength of the service. Staff are approachable and readily available to offer

support; supervisory visits are regular and meaningful. The service is due to host its first foster carer support group meeting the week following the inspection. All foster carers receive the agency's foster carer handbook which contains comprehensive information, policies and procedures, advice and support covering an extensive range of subject matters relevant to the fostering task. One foster carer said of the service, 'Support here is excellent'. This view is overwhelming shared by other foster carers.

The training of foster carers is also identified as an area for improvement. Training provided to foster carers thus far has prioritised child protection and safe care. First aid training has also been provided. Managers of the service continue to work on developing a high quality comprehensive training programme to support the efforts of its foster carers. For example training focussed on disability issues is shortly to be delivered. Managers of the fostering service acknowledge that the existing training programme requires some attention in order to broaden the skills and knowledge base of existing and potential foster carers. This is in order for them to meet well the diverse needs of children and young people in their care. Identified individual foster carer training needs are not always followed up and no foster carer approved for 12 months or more has attained the required Training, Support and Development Standards.

Foster carers demonstrate a strong understanding of the needs of children and young people and encourage strong and healthy attachments between them, other family members and looked after children. Children and young people consistently speak of feeling a part of their foster family and they have a strong sense of belonging. This has a positive impact on children and young people's self-confidence and self-esteem. One child says of his foster family, 'This is my family and they love and look after me'. Even when placements end abruptly, young people are able to acknowledge the positive impact the placement has had on their lives. One such young person says of his former foster carer, 'I would not be the person I am today if it were not for my foster carer'. This is very strong evidence of the clear bond and attachment young people share with their foster families.

In addition to these attachments, children and young people maintain, where it is safe for them to do so, contact with their parents, other extended family members, brothers and sisters. The fostering service has a respite system in place, which facilitates foster carers to take breaks from caring when they need to. This is yet to be used by any foster carer.

Foster carers and staff of the fostering team work in effective collaboration with external professionals. This is important to establish placement objectives and determine collectively how children and young people's needs are to be met. Social workers from placing authorities are largely positive about the care provided to children and young people and indicate they are satisfied with the level of communication and partnership working between managers and staff of the fostering service and their local authority.

The service's fostering panel is newly constituted and is another area identified for improvement. The panel is not yet fully effective or efficient and does not function as a quality assurance mechanism for the fostering service. The fostering panel has

access to relevant policies, procedures and protocols to assist its function. However training opportunities and professional advice has been limited and this has not enhanced the efficiency of the panel. Some panel members are unclear of their role and the administration of panel meetings is not consistently well-organised. The fostering service's panel will benefit from a programme of training to enhance the skills and knowledge base of participants in making recommendations about potential and existing foster carers.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people are safe while in placement and say that they feel safe. Their relationships within fostering households are very positive. Foster carers are able to set fair and appropriate boundaries, which children and young people largely adhere to. They do not identify bullying as a concern. They confirm they are aware how to make complaints and they receive information about independent advocates. No complaints have been made against the service.

Children and young people benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures, which have been shared with the host local authority.

Foster carers receive good written guidance and training to assist them keep children and young people safe from harm and abuse. Foster carers receive training that focuses specifically on safe caring and each household has a written safe caring family policy in place.

There have been no instances of children or young people being absent without permission or missing from care; equally no looked after child is suspected to be involved in Child Sexual Exploitation. The service has comprehensive procedures in place to guide foster carers and counteract these risky behaviours. Children and young people's case files evidence documented risk assessments to alert staff and foster carers to potential or known risks. Behavioural management policies also support foster carers in managing risks posed to children and young people. Managers of the fostering service ensure that safeguarding policies are appropriately reviewed.

To date there have been no allegations made against any foster carer. Foster carers receive clear and detailed guidance about the management of allegations. This information includes both the role and responsibilities of staff in the event of an allegation being made, and the level and nature of support foster carers can expect.

Children and young people are kept safe as a result of the fostering services good recruitment and vetting practices. The service has procedures in place that ensure the careful selection and vetting of staff, foster carers and those on the agencies central list. The fostering service's personnel files for these individuals' evidence full

vetting checks are carried out as required by the regulations. The service does not however consistently contact referees to verify written references received as outlined in the National Minimum Standards.

Foster carers provide nurturing, stable and safe environments. Staff supervisory visits provide an opportunity for foster carers to discuss the individual progress each child or young person is making and to raise any safeguarding issues or concerns. During these visits, looked after children are also spoken with giving them an opportunity to speak privately about any concerns they may have. Staff undertake at least one unannounced visit per year. This is to further promote the safety and well-being of children and young people in placement.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and to support services to improve.

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. Inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.