

ISP Enfield

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Integrated Services Programme (ISP) Enfield is an independent fostering agency and is part of a limited company. The other centres are based in Buckinghamshire, Sussex, throughout Kent and in South London.

The ISP Enfield office provides staff offices and also has rooms available for therapy sessions, education, meetings, contact and training. ISP Enfield provides a wide range of services, including social work support for foster carers and children, a range of therapeutic services, educational support and assistance with transport.

ISP Enfield foster carers provide short-term, emergency, long-term respite care and parent and child placements. The centre currently has 24 fostering households and 30 children placed with them. A further 11 family members are approved to provide respite to support these placements.

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: **Outstanding**

Children receive excellent direct work which addresses their therapeutic and educational needs. Foster carers, staff and management express pride in their sense of community. Children benefit from nurturing, life-enriching placements, which build resilience, confidence and their self-esteem. They feel part of a family and there is a strong commitment to securing permanence. The agency prioritises children's needs and works holistically to provide targeted support. For some children, their progress is exceptional based on their starting points.

The foster carers' receive extensive support and they are embraced as part of the professional team. They have excellent training opportunities and there is a high completion rate for their vocational training. Training and practice incorporates research and developments in the field and contributes to the high quality work.

The inspiring, innovative therapeutic aspect of the service runs like a thread throughout all of the centre's work. The long-standing registered manager is highly experienced, visible and effective. Reflection and continuous learning improve professional practice among foster carers and staff.

The centre is influencing the sector and public opinion through their national and international work. This includes contributing to All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) discussions, a television programme, theatre productions and a global fostering network.

Children benefit from good safeguarding arrangements. A particular strength is the online information, individual work and focused social work, which contribute to children's personal safety. There are currently no issues in relation to missing episodes or child sexual exploitation. Staff and foster carers benefit from ongoing training, which helps them to protect children. The centre's recruitment practices are thorough.

The agency is financially viable, with high staffing levels. The agency focuses on providing substantial support to children and foster carers. There are highly effective relationships with local authorities and the centre has an exceptional reputation for sustaining placements. Service development builds on the centre's strengths and addresses trends and patterns in relation to meeting the changing needs of children.

There are no breaches of regulations. Shortfalls do not have a detrimental impact on children. The shortfalls relate to ensuring that procedures comprehensively incorporate updates in safeguarding.

Areas for improvement

Recommendation

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

the provider should ensure that there are clear and effective procedures which take into account updates in safeguarding (NMS, 25.1).

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children benefit from excellent wraparound services within a therapeutic framework. Direct work enables most children to make exceptional progress based on their initial starting points. Children are thriving educationally, emotionally and socially. They demonstrate resilience, improved confidence and self-esteem, which makes them aspirational for the future. Children proudly list the positive aspects of foster care, stating they 'love it' and 'do not want to leave'. They comment on the 'new opportunities', and say that they are the 'better for it'. Other children state that their foster carer 'makes me happy' and 'loves me like her own'.

Children feel part of a family, both within the centre and as part of the fostering household. They are part of a dedicated group which enables them to socialise together and enjoy fun activities. They appreciate the peer friendships and acknowledgement of a shared experience. Within the centre, there is an enormous collage of famous people who were fostered. This motivates children and gives them a sense of value through realising that celebrities share their care background.

There is a strong emphasis on permanency because there are a significant number of long-term placements. Children develop secure attachments with their foster carers. They feel part of a family and affectionately call their female foster carer 'Mum', 'Aunty' or 'Grandma'. Relatives form the majority of respite carers, providing good continuity of care and familiarity to children. Adult birth children also assist with sessional work. A child comments that their foster carer's birth children give them 'inspiration' and help them to be 'the best I can'.

Children dynamically share their care experience regionally, nationally and internationally. This includes contributing towards a television programme, theatre productions, APPG discussions and an international network dedicated to the promotion and support of family-based foster care across the world.

Children have an active voice within the agency, contributing to social activities, to their own group and towards the organisational calendar, children's guide and magazine. They also take an influential role in the initial foster carer training and annual reviews. There are also plans to elicit their feedback to feed into staff appraisals. Children understand how to complain. However, they report that there are no concerns.

Children live within foster homes which strongly promote their diverse needs. There is a good understanding of religious and cultural differences. There are examples of children learning their parents' first language. Children attend their places of worship and take pride in who they are. Memory boxes help them to reflect on their lives and to collate meaningful memories. There is good facilitation of contact, where it promotes a child's best interests. Foster carers also go over and above to maintain a positive link, an example being inviting relatives to birthday parties. A contact centre is available at the office and dedicated staff can supervise sessions if needed.

There is excellent prioritisation of children's health and well-being. Where there is a delay in providing mental health services, the agency is able to provide therapy sessions for children. Therapy creatively forms part of the integrated working. There is extensive access to professionals, including a psychiatrist, a clinical psychologist, a speech and language therapist and an educational psychologist. There is a strong understanding of the trauma that children present with and active working to alleviate concerns. The centre innovatively embraces research and development in the field to benefit children. An example is the use of Lego-based therapy, which helps with social skills through facilitated collaborative group play.

Each child, where appropriate has a health and well-being audit. These are linked to World Health Organisation and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance. Older children benefit from specialist support in relation to drugs counselling and sexual health. All children are available to attend health-based workshops or to receive individual support to address specific issues. A recent workshop was enlightening for children as it highlighted the amount of sugar in drinks.

Foster carers state that children are treated like their own and they 'fight' for their rights. They strongly advocate for the children's health needs, an example being a foster carer advocating for a health assessment. The subsequent medication resulted in a child having a calmer mood, more patience and the ability to engage positively in meaningful activities. There are additional examples of stability helping to improve enuresis and selective mutism.

Children are achieving their educational potential and in some cases they are exceeding expectations. The centre rigorously monitors school attendance and educational outcomes. The children benefit from individual tuition from the educational coordinator. The exceptionally strong advocacy work enables them to receive the specific support they need. This relates to their learning needs and also to identifying those who are gifted and talented. The centre celebrates children through their summer prom achievement ceremony. A high number of children go on to further education, including universities. The agency's associated charity The Sparks Foundation (SPARKS) is able to provide university students with a grant of £1,000 a year, which assists with meeting their financial needs.

Children and young people pursue their hobbies and talents and attend a wide range of clubs. They benefit from the provision of sessional workers who help with developing their interests. They also learn to appreciate cultural activities, for example going to the theatre. Children also enjoy going on holidays abroad, which expands their experience of the world. A supervising social worker states, 'watching our children settle and grow is amazing. To see them doing well and achieving is phenomenal.'

The organisation is proactively addressing leaving care issues through independence skills assessments, which contribute to pathway plans. Proposed action focuses on the specific independence skills. Where possible, children undertake age-appropriate daily living tasks. Active promotion of life skills promotes self-responsibility. The

agency through SPARKS helps with the transition into adulthood, through providing a grant for care leavers, if there are gaps in statutory responsibilities.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The centre excels in the substantial level of support and training that it provides to foster carers. This results in highly satisfied, well-trained foster carers who bring considerable expertise and professionalism to their role. The centre provides extensive training opportunities which incorporate research and developments in the field. This inspires high quality work and the therapeutic input enables them to understand issues on a deeper level.

The centre has high expectations of their foster carers and there is a significant emphasis on their training and development. Foster carers undergo a probationary period of approximately two years. During this time, there is an expectation that they complete a comprehensive range of courses and their vocational training. A dedicated worker is available to assist with their training, their support and their development standards workbook. Buddies are also available to mentor new foster carers. Foster carers describe training as 'extremely informative,' and 'enlightening'.

Foster carers state that they receive 'excellent support', and that they particularly appreciate the 24-hour support. General and therapeutic support includes individual and group work. The latter includes reflective consultation with a psychotherapist, enabling them to work effectively with children who have complex and multiple needs. A foster carer comments on their 'acquired resilience, understanding and empathy', which they can utilise in current and future placements.

Supervising social workers are strong advocates and undertake an extensive range of tasks to support foster carers. Additionally, support has a social element, which includes monthly walks in a local park, coffee mornings and seasonal parties. Practical support also includes assistance with transport and paid respite.

The centre actively considers any help or support required by the birth children of foster carers. Birth children are valued and benefit from their own group. An example of the innovative work is the sons and daughters of foster carers' exhibition, which celebrated their individuality and their contribution.

Foster carers influence the service locally and through their forum involvement in advocating for national change, an example being campaigning for better arrangements under 'Staying Put'. Foster carers confidently make day-to-day decisions and appropriately use delegated authority. Foster carers comment that the centre is 'like a family'. A foster carer highlights that 'this is one of the best jobs I have ever done.'

The agency has a wide range of carers and there is an excellent retention rate. The centre's team plan shows details of their service development goals. Placement targets have been achieved and they are on target for foster carer recruitment. The recruitment strategy continues to evolve and uses social media. Children benefit from exceptionally strong matching arrangements. The centre has a very good reputation for sustaining placements and holding on to children. Commissioners highlight the minimal placement breakdown as an asset. They attribute this to good matching and to only accepting a referral if they can holistically meet the child's needs. Within transracial and transcultural placements, additional resources are highlighted where needed.

The fostering panel focuses on decision making which promotes the best interests of children. Central list members have a range of expertise, which includes social work, health, education and fostering. The panel is relatively culturally diverse and has male representation. There is an awareness of the need to broaden the central list to ensure a higher level of diversity. The dynamic panel chair is a highly experienced social work professional. The panel's extensive background in child protection, fostering and adoption enables it to lead in a purposefully informed manner.

Independent staff undertake good strength-based assessments within the required timescales. A new foster carer highlighted that they 'really enjoyed' the assessment process. The panel maintains a constructively independent relationship with the agency. They positively embrace their quality assurance function, influencing assessments, foster carer support and service development. Panel members benefit from training and annual appraisals. The agency decision maker is a relatively new senior manager within the organisation. At this centre, their work has mainly involved approving the first annual reviews.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children feel safe and they learn the importance of keeping themselves safe. This includes online safety and the dangers of child sexual exploitation. The centre has an ambassador who leads on protecting children from harm online and offline. Foster carers benefit from individual work and from being updated on the latest developments within social media and popular mobile applications. Safeguarding work with children includes gender-specific groups and one-to-one work, which addresses self-esteem, drugs, sex and relationships and gangs. There is an extensive range of information on the organisational computerised resource, enabling children and foster carers to update their knowledge.

The child protection procedure meets regulatory requirements. The agency effectively manages child protection allegations. The organisation is effectively influencing the national picture of fostering through its involvement in university research which focuses on allegations against foster carers. Fostering households have safe caring guidelines and risk assessments which provide foresight in

identifying possible hazards or risks of harm. Supervisory visits are child-focused. They also monitor placements through regular health and safety checks and unannounced visits.

Foster carers and staff have regular safeguarding training, which ensures that they are clear on the issues and their responsibilities. A new resource is being introduced in relation to the 'Prevent' duty and to address radicalisation. Senior managers have an overview of risks and safeguarding matters. At the centre level, the registered manager ensures that safeguarding and child protection are informed by research and developments in the field. Practice is kept updated and is adapted accordingly. This includes information on child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. There is an acknowledgement that the organisation's centralised policies and procedures need to reflect better the broader aspects of safeguarding.

Currently there are no serious issues in relation to children going missing. The agency takes these matters seriously, attending strategy meetings and endeavouring to get to the root of issues. The missing procedure has reference to local protocols, escalation details and action to reduce and prevent episodes. Supervising social workers assist, where necessary, with return home interviews.

There are no children identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation. There is an analysis of significant events, which feeds into the placement stability ratings. The indicator of concerns ensures that focused multi-agency work is undertaken. The disruption rate within the agency is extremely low. There is good analysis of unplanned endings, learning from what could have been done differently. This has a positive impact on future placements and gives closure to foster parents and birth children.

Foster carers demonstrate great inner strength and resilience in working with the complex behaviour presented by children. There is strong multi-disciplinary working. Foster carers provide firm guidelines, and instil boundaries and values. There is a uniform consensus between foster carer and staff where they are unable to keep children safe. This is fed back promptly to placing authorities and the centre actively advocates for a secure or residential placement.

Foster carers benefit from research-based therapeutic crisis intervention training. They effectively use diversion techniques and are able to reframe and think about situations. A child confirms that their foster carer is 'loving and strict'. A placing social worker comments on the foster carers' abilities to offer 'care and safety within the context of firm boundaries' which they find 'outstanding'.

Therapeutic input assists with placement stability and behaviour management. A foster carer gave an example of a teenager who was expressing suicidal thoughts, highlighting that the centre had 'saved his life'. Foster carers benefit from individual therapeutic support which enables them to understand a child's behaviour and to manage their own feelings. A foster carer states that this 'helped tremendously through a very difficult period.'

Children receive protection from safe recruitment practices. Staff and panel member

recruitment and vetting meets regulatory requirements. Comprehensive checks, verification and exploration of issues ensure that unsuitable people do not have an opportunity to harm children. The agency also ensures that workers are registered with the necessary professional bodies.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children benefit from a consistently outstanding service led by a long-standing, highly experienced registered manager. There is an exceptional deployment of staff, which succeeds in holistically meeting the diverse needs of children and foster carers. A foster carer states that this 'is an outstanding agency' and that they 'do all they can to help. Another highlights 'I am very proud to say I am part of this wonderful organisation'. A child is thankful for the centre stating that they 'they gave me a family'.

Commissioners comment that the centre is 'more than happy to put in any additional services if needed.' One describes it as a 'competent agency' and they are 'confident in their abilities.' They add that 'if there is a breakdown at ISP you know that child is going to residential.' Managers and staff develop highly effective working relationships with placing authorities, schools, health professionals, the police and youth offending teams.

The organisational change from a not for profit fostering agency, to being part of a limited company has had minimal impact on this centre. There is a natural apprehension regarding changes in the future. A foster carer says that they 'do not want them in the long term to erode the superb work.' Senior managers and leaders have strategic oversight of the centre. They monitor the risks and overall effectiveness of each service. A senior leader describes Enfield as a 'well-established centre' with a 'good infrastructure', highlighting that 'it is one of the most stable teams'. They feel that it offers 'excellent quality', which is magnified by the 'genuinely therapeutic approach'.

The registered manager has been in post for approximately nine years. This individual is also a trained counsellor. The registered manager takes great pride in the centre's work and their knowledge of the children. The registered manager is also influential through chairing the London Youth Justice Association and lecturing on a health and social care course. They also share their views in APPG discussions. Foster carers highlight that the registered manager is 'on the ball and very committed'. One comments on her 'amazing support' and 'going above and beyond' to help.

Supervising social workers express their pride in working for the centre. Staff and managers are appropriately qualified, experienced and supervised. Social work staff benefit from reflective supervision, which addresses their caseload, development and also their emotional well-being. Regional meetings enable them to share good

practice, promote consistency and keep updated on legislation. Staff benefit from continuous personal development through a wide range of training. The agency is a learning organisation and influences the sector through offering placements to health and social care and social work students.

The organisation is having an impact on the sector through sponsoring an award. This relates to the 2015 Fostering Excellence Awards. They highlight that 'without the support of ISP we would not have been able to recognise the businesses and organisations that recognise that foster carers can provide real value to the community.'

There are plans to improve further the outcomes for children through the transition to family care plans. This will innovatively enable children to transfer from residential to foster care. Foster carers at the centre are looking forward to undertaking the necessary training. This will enable children to benefit from living within a family environment.

The centre regularly monitors, reviews and tracks the progress of individual children. Data demonstrates that the vast majority of children are exceeding in all outcome areas. Quality assurance is ongoing through a series of staff and management meetings. The monitoring aspects of regulation 35 reports are completed and meet requirements.

The agency is financially sound and foster carers are paid on time. The agency appropriately notifies Ofsted of significant events, in accordance with regulations. The recommendation from the last inspection is no longer applicable as the centre now has a paperless computerised system.

The comprehensive statement of purpose details the agency's aims, objectives and working practices. Interested parties can access this document and further information from the agency's comprehensive website. The organisation also provides an excellent online resource, which enables children, care leavers and foster carers to access pertinent information. The agency has a social media presence. Children also benefit from their own age appropriate guide which concisely highlights what they can expect from the agency.

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.