

# Integrated Services Programme

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This privately owned fostering agency is one of four separately registered branches operated by this company across the country. Since the last inspection ISP has become part of a much larger national organisation, PICS, that comprises Fosterplus, ISP, Orange Grove and Clifford House Fostering companies which have many individual agencies.

The head office for ISP is based at Sittingbourne in Kent and centres serving the Kent and South London region are located in Teynham, Whitstable, Rainham and Caterham.

Foster carers provide long term, short term, respite and permanent care. There is also provision for parent and child placements. At the time of this inspection there were 205 approved households caring for 209 children.

### 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 is a long established agency, with a history of providing good quality care. Since the last inspection the agency has become part of a national organisation and there has been a more recent change of manager. This inspection identified shortfalls in safeguarding and leadership and management, predominantly arising from a lack of robust oversight, review and evaluation. This misses opportunities to inform and develop practice and drive improvements in the agency.

Central policies and procedures, for example child protection, missing and behaviour management, that underpin the work of the agency and should provide staff and carers with detailed guidance do not provide sufficient clarity about what is required. This means that some aspects of the work of the agency are insufficiently robust in showing how children and young people are fully safeguarded.

The systems for monitoring the matters required by regulation look at the incidents in isolation. This fails to inform change that could develop practice across the agency. For example there is insufficient analysis of complaints and whistleblowing outcomes, return home interviews, or the use of disciplinary measures and therefore a failure to identify potential patterns and trends.

There is variation in the quality of the evaluation in assessments of prospective foster carers. The suitability of accommodation of foster carers is not evaluated by panel or the agency decision maker.

Supervision, review and appraisal records of staff and foster carers lack evidence of challenge and reflection or discussion of the impact of the training on practice, and do not routinely include a focus on safeguarding. Designated safeguarding leads have not undertaken training specifically for this role. Some foster carers have not undertaken the range of training necessary.

Despite these areas that require improvement, the agency has many strengths. The experienced, committed and skilled foster carers have embraced children and young people as part of their families and provided stability and good outcomes for the majority. The dedicated multi-disciplinary team provides valued direct support to children and young people in placement and their foster carers. This engenders a feeling of a family support network throughout the agency for those involved. The agency has the resources and the desire to make the necessary improvements.

## 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
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that – the welfare of children placed or to be placed is safeguarded and promoted at all times. In particular analyse incidents of missing to identify any trends and patterns to inform strategic	30 April 2016

approaches to safeguard young people. (Regulation 11 (a))	
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which- is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect. This is specific to linking with other policies and procedures concerned with protecting children, including safeguards with respect to children with disabilities or those seeking asylum and new to the area and improve the whistleblowing policy and procedural guidance. Regulation 12 (1)(a))	15 May 2016
The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents. In particular make clear that only the restraint techniques provided by the training and sanctioned by the agency should be used and give specific guidance about how to record these incidents. (Regulation 13 (1))	15 May 2016
The registered person must maintain a system for – improving the quality of care provided by the fostering agency. The system must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (3))	31 May 2016
The fostering service provider must ensure that all person’s employed by them – receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. In particular that designated safeguarding leads receive the training necessary for this role. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))	31 May 2016

**Recommendations**

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

Securely evidence how the fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection (NMS 4.7)

Ensure foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service (NMS 20.4)

In all cases ensure that the written report on the person’s suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and

decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. In particular achieve greater consistency the quality of the analysis in assessments (NMS 13.7)

Record how children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress (NMS 1.7)

Ensure panel is given full information on foster carers' accommodation to enable them to assess, during the approval process and at annual reviews, that the home is and continues to be suitable (NMS 10.2)

Maintain a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. (NMS 22.7)

Ensure the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. (NMS 16.1)

Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. (NMS 25.2)

Demonstrate that all staff, volunteers and the registered person are properly managed and supported. (NMS 24.2)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Foster carers understand the importance of introductions to children and young people. They have developed family profiles as part of information sharing before placement. Where there is a planned placement time is taken to effect introductions at a pace the child is comfortable with, one example given by a foster carer was of a five month process. A child told of the carer visiting him in his previous placement as well as his visit to the foster home. This works to good effect. Children and young people moved in an emergency report that foster carers are good at making them feel welcome and settling them in. A foster carer said 'The children become part of our family history, we're building their lives'.

The majority of children and young people are in established placements and consider themselves part of the family. Those spoken with were unanimous in feeling safe and their warm and affectionate interactions with foster carers and staff demonstrated confidence and trust in these significant adults. In conversation children and young people consistently referred to their foster carers as family and conveyed a strong sense of belonging. One young person said 'It's been the best experience, made my life' another commented 'I don't feel like I'm in care'. A significant number move on to permanent arrangements with their foster family, either through long term matching, or legal permanence arrangements. There are also some unplanned endings where, despite the support network, the foster carers and agency, and sometimes the young person, do not consider the placement is working well enough. Often young people move to other foster carers within the agency and keep in touch with their previous carers. This enables young people to learn how relationships can be maintained after some difficult times.

The agency maintains a dedicated focus on the needs of the child, one child said 'They don't judge you'. The tailored support for children and young people is led and informed by the needs of each individual. As a result they benefit from therapeutic input that addresses their identified needs. The therapeutic coordinator is instrumental in identifying the type of input that would most benefit each child or young person. A number of resources are available within the agency, including speech and language, psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural therapy. The coordinator has the authority to contract external resources when this is necessary to meet a specialist need. This ensures that children and young people are provided with either direct or indirect support (through foster carers) by specialists. One young person said 'If it wasn't for the therapy man I don't know where I'd be'. A foster carer noted improvements in the behaviour of a young person as a result of the therapeutic input received.

Children and young people benefit from the sound understanding by the agency of the importance of contact. The agency has a dedicated contact centre with consistent workers that promote safe and enjoyable visits for all involved in supervised contact. Contact is very well managed and children say that they are happy with the arrangements, particularly when there are living with foster carers in the same

agency.

Children and young people express their views, wishes and feelings in their daily lives. They can explain how foster carers listen to them and how things can change as a result. Children and young people know how to complain and are provided with the information in different formats and given choices about how to make a complaint, on-line, by phone or in writing. They are supported to use advocacy services and other measures to ensure that their rights are upheld, for example in challenging placing authority decisions. Children and young people spoken with were confident that they could talk to their foster carers about bullying or any other concerns they had.

Most young people are learning to take responsibility for their behaviour. Incidents of missing are low. Few young people continue to engage in offending behaviour or misusing drugs. One young person spoken with confirmed that he is given 'lots of advice' and a range of specialist support choices but chooses not to listen or engage, despite the best endeavours of the foster carers and the agency. He also said that he believes the foster carers worry about him and he feels bad when he does things that will disappoint them. However this has not yet had an impact on his behaviour. The resulting risks are well-known and identified but partnership working is not well evidenced in the records seen.

Children and young people's health needs are well met. The agency supports foster carers to adopt a holistic approach. Thus ensuring that day-to-day health care needs are met and also seen in a wider context where necessary. Children and young people with disabilities live with skilled foster carers who advocate for them and ensure they have the right equipment and resources. One young person spoke proudly of his mobility car, driven by people he chooses, which enables access to the activities he wants to do.

Children and young people receive strong support to enable them to succeed at school. The education coordinators are well established in each centre and have good links with and knowledge of local schools. These links ensure that children and young people attend schools that meet their needs, be they mainstream or specialist. Some young people attend the agency education provision, where this is the best fit for their learning needs. Children and young people are achieving well and their progress is robustly monitored and evaluated by the education coordinator. This monitoring ensures that measures can be implemented to steady school placements or boost achievement for example. One young person said 'Without my foster carer I wouldn't be able to read'. A number of young people are attending university and minimal numbers of young people disengage from education. Those that do are given robust support and guidance to gain college places or employment.

The agency encourages and supports foster carers to be creative in how they involve and sustain children and young people's engagement in activities and opportunities. The Thursday group, run by the agency, is thoroughly enjoyed and valued by all who attend. Staff and foster carers work in partnership to provide a wide range of varying activities. There is a lively, warm and inclusive atmosphere which enables all children and young people to participate. They also benefit from building positive relationships



with each other, across age ranges and abilities, in a safe environment. Children and young people are also enthusiastic about the community based activities they do and talk positively about their experiences. Examples include going to youth clubs, cubs and brownies, where they can make friends and feel part of the local community as well as sports clubs and other interest based groups. One young person spoke about his experience overseas as a volunteer in a pre-school and an orphanage, 'a fantastic experience', another about his first holiday overseas.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has maintained a steady recruitment of foster carers by word of mouth. The agency encourages foster carers to identify a relative or friend who is prepared to be assessed to provide short breaks to a named child to support the placement. This provides continuity for children and young people and also maintains a family identity, giving children a sense of belonging and maintaining stability.

The agency specialises in managing children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour. There have been significant changes to the therapeutic department since the last inspection. There is now a coordinating therapist located in each centre. The coordinating therapist applies a robust process for identifying the therapeutic needs of children and young people, if any, and how and when these will be met. The agency employs therapists from a range of disciplines and has developed links with self-employed therapists whom they contract where this best meets the assessed needs of children and young people.

The focus on the needs of children and young people is a strength of the agency and informs all aspects of their engagement with foster carers. Young people participate in the preparation of foster carers prior to assessment and their contribution is valued. Foster carers describe training events, for example on post-traumatic stress, that give them the child's perspective and develops an empathic approach. Foster carers demonstrate a sound understanding of their role as part of the team around the child and the roles of the other team members, for example the child's social worker and the supervising social worker.

Foster carers are skilled at ensuring that children and young people are embraced as part of the family while ensuring this does not exclude other significant adults to the children. Foster carers work effectively in partnership with these adults. One young person was very eloquent as he described how his foster carers had developed a relationship with his Mum, which had effectively supported his long term placement. Foster carers spoken with say 'The whole agency is like an extended family, we all pull together, there's a connection between us'. This family feeling means that children receiving support from other foster carers can still feel part of the family network. Children and young people with high medical needs may go to a specialist unit for a short break.

There is a robust training schedule, informed by statutory requirements and the presenting needs of young people. The outcomes of high profile cases is also used to inform training for staff and carers for example, on self-harm following serious case review findings around suicide in young people. The agency strives to be flexible in the timing and venues for training of foster carers to ensure attendance by as many as possible. Creative action is taken to enable second carers to access training. This includes delivering training at weekend and in the foster carers' homes. However some foster carers have not attended a sufficient level of training. This is not always robustly challenged by panel.

There are arrangements in place to ensure that those carers of children with disabilities have access to the necessary training to support their work, as do the staff supporting the foster carer. Young people are involved in training, for example there is a young person supporting on the skills to foster training, unaccompanied asylum minors training, and internet safety training. Children's involvement has also included attendance at the international fostering conference, in 2015 in Sydney and in 2013 in Tokyo. These experiences also benefit the young people to build their confidence.

Observation and discussion with foster carers and staff demonstrate exceptionally supportive relationships. Those foster carers seen were unanimous in describing in glowing terms the support that they receive. One said 'They will do anything to help us support the children in our care'. Another 'Support is always available, even out of hours you know who will be on the end of the phone and they will know you and the child'. Foster carers are active participants in the team around the child. Their views and opinions are valued and used to inform care planning. Foster carers speak positively about the support for children who foster. One young person who fosters commented positively on the trips out for their group and regular opportunities to speak with the supervising social worker.

Foster carers report that the agency listens to their ideas. Long standing carers cite with pride the creation of the building on the Teynham site, a suite of multi-purpose well-appointed rooms. There are forum representatives who feed suggestions through to the quarterly meetings with ISP board members. The response to suggestions is described as prompt. Some centres actively seek formal feedback from foster carers though not all centres have completed this. Where feedback has been obtained from children and foster carers this has not yet been formally evaluated.

Panel members are recruited from a range of relevant professional and diverse backgrounds. The panel actively engages with the agency through an established panel adviser. The quality of the analysis in assessments is variable and does not always identify sufficiently well the impact of and learning from past experiences although there were some very good examples. There are sound quality assurance systems in place for the written assessments of prospective carers but the impact of these is not always evident.

Matching is generally of a very good standard, particularly for planned placements. This is borne out by the number of long term, permanent and staying put arrangements, about 70% of the total placements at the time of this visit, higher than the national comparator level of 57%. The dedicated referral team seeks

additional information to inform matching where there are gaps and foster carers have significant input into the process. The agency successfully retains foster carers, achieved by positive matching and the right support for them, their families and the children placed.

The agency promotes a team approach and this includes the child's social worker and independent reviewing officer. Reviews take place at least at the minimum frequency but also when needs change. There is effective communication across the team that focuses on how to improve outcomes for each young person. This includes obtaining written delegated authority for foster carers that reflects the status of the child or young person's placement.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Children and young people can talk about how they are educated, supported and encouraged to keep themselves safe and say they feel safe. They have a good understanding of areas of potential risk. Placement plans capture the necessary information but the supporting risk assessments are not always specific in setting out the detailed action to be taken to reduce risks. Reviews take place, with updates to documents made as required.

Children and young people spoken with were confident that they know how to complain, that their concerns are taken seriously and these are managed well. Similarly, where a complaint is made against a foster carer they are provided with the relevant support and their complaint is appropriately managed. However, children and foster carers do not always receive a formal written response with the outcome of their complaint in line with the organisation's complaint procedure. Although the procedure makes clear that children can raise concerns if they are unhappy with the outcome of their complaint, without details of the findings it is unclear how they can respond.

Recommendations arising from complaint investigations and panel discussion is not always robustly followed, for example, where the agency is asked to monitor the quality of the foster carers' practice. While the manager is clear about the work taking place, this is not explored sufficiently well in the records of the supervising social worker.

Where children and young people are missing or considered to be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) foster carers and the agency report promptly to the relevant professionals, for example the placing authority and the police with evidence of good liaison and partnership working. The recently improved CSE risk assessment tool provides better clarity around the actions to be taken to minimise risk and support the young people. Return interviews are taking place but the actions to minimise risk

or the support the young person's needs is not always sufficiently robust or specific. Comments such as 'foster carer to monitor or 'risk assessment updated' does not provide the specifics of what is required of the foster carer or when and who is responsible for updating the risk assessment. Where young people are going missing and do not wish to engage in return home interviews or to tell carers or social workers of their whereabouts it is not always clear how the risks in such circumstances are assessed. While there is detailed management monitoring of individual events, both in the agency and at senior management level, overall there is an absence of analysis of trends and patterns of missing to inform strategic approaches to safeguard young people. The underpinning child protection policy lacks explicit referral to the relevant local authority safeguarding board procedures. Neither does it link with nor cross reference to the organisation's overall policies and procedures concerned with protecting children for example, missing, CSE, radicalisation and behaviour management. There is no mention of the additional safeguards with respect to children with disabilities or children seeking asylum and new to the area.

Foster carers spoken with have a good awareness of and sensitivity to potential and actual abuse. They demonstrate a sound understanding of safeguarding issues and are knowledgeable about and confident in the action they would take to secure the welfare of children placed with them. Although foster carers describe how training in safeguarding impacts on their practice, this is not fully supported by recordings in their supervision.

Staff identified by foster carers as those that they would report concerns to have not undertaken specific designated persons training; neither has the agency safeguarding coordinator. Staff and carers have participated in relevant safeguarding and child protection training. The agency is rolling out a training programme for all foster carers, staff and the safeguarding co-ordinator, that includes radicalisation under the prevent duty. The agency has recognised that this training also needs to be accessible to children and plans to ensure this happens.

Foster carers understand how abuse and neglect can be demonstrated by young people in their presenting behaviour. The records show a range of strategies used by carers to manage behaviour. This includes the use of physical intervention for which they receive the necessary training. Their use of such measures is infrequent but the recording does not always provide the necessary detail about the antecedents, the type of technique used, the duration, and the behaviour displayed by children. For example, describing a child as 'aggressive' or 'violent' does not provide sufficient detail to warrant the use of physical intervention. The underpinning behaviour management policy indicates that any foster carer using restraint must be competent and authorised to do so but does not make clear that only the restraint techniques provided by the training and sanctioned by the agency should be used. Neither does it give sufficient guidance about how to record these incidents.

The recruitment, assessment and preparation to foster training explores in sufficient detail carers' capacity to safeguard children and young people. However, the health

and safety aspect of both the assessment and annual review process is weak. There is no clear guidance for assessing and reviewing social workers to follow and so the process of conducting health and safety checks in fostering households is inconsistent and not sufficiently monitored. For example the dates of gas and electrical checks and certificates are not always recorded and such omissions have gone unchallenged by quality assurance checks. Health and safety checklists are not included in information presented to panel. So neither panel members nor the decision maker receive information to enable them to determine whether or not the accommodation is safe and suitable. Supervising social workers undertake regular unannounced visits. Children and young people, including those who foster, confirm that they can and do see the supervising social worker on their own.

A weak whistle blowing policy is further undermined by a lack of procedural guidance. Where it has been used the management of the concerns raised is not thorough. There is no evidence of consultation with external professionals. In addition, the action taken in light of recommendations made following an investigation is not clear and the learning from this is not apparent. Current guidance and practice does not encourage staff to raise concerns in good faith.

The recruitment of staff and panel members is robust and contributes to ensuring the employment of suitable people.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

There has been a recent change in the management of the agency. The new appointee is not yet registered with Ofsted but the process is well underway. The acting manager is also a centre manager and this limits her management capacity. The previous post holder did not have the same demands. Since the last inspection there has been a change of ownership and the agency has become part of a larger organisation. The acting manager has not inherited robust systems for monitoring and reporting on relevant issues. The current systems for monitoring the matters required by regulation fail to analyse and evaluate the information. Thus the management do not identify trends and patterns or evidence how the agency promotes a learning culture. This also misses the opportunity to provide a good foundation for a sound development plan for improving the quality of care. Neither do systems for quality review include action in response to consultation with children, foster carers, and placing authorities. In a similar way the good practice of senior management monitoring of significant incidents does not provide a quality analysis, and in some cases the information simply replicates the details of the incident. This does not support the managers across the partnership to develop greater awareness in their overall management and monitoring of practice and the service.

This is a well-established agency with a good track record in developing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders. The vast majority of social workers who expressed a view reported good lines of communication. One noted 'There is constant dialogue between the agency and the social workers. This can take the form of inter-professional working to enable the right services provided by the relevant professional body'. The agency maintains a clear focus on the needs of children and young people. Their needs are identified and action taken to address these using specialist input where necessary.

Management, staff and foster carers are all able to articulate and model the therapeutic and family ethos of the service. The outcomes and progress of most children and young people and their comments reflect that it is delivered in practice. However the enthusiasm and commitment to this ethos is not fully reflected in the agency's statement of purpose or the policies and procedures.

The agency has increased its pool of foster carers with prospective carers learning of the agency by word of mouth. While retention is good overall it is not clear how the service uses information from referral patterns to inform recruitment. For example at the time of this visit there was no clear strategy to recruit the range of carers to meet the emerging demands of placing authorities, for example meeting the needs of children seeking asylum.

Supervising social workers use a visual indicator on the electronic recording system to reflect the stability of a placement. They keep this under review, note any changes and take effective action to promote stability.

The agency is robustly resourced to provide a very good level of support to children, young people and foster carers. Staffing of the service includes centre managers, supervising social workers, foster care advisors, a range of therapists, and educational and health specialists, a number of whom have been in post some time. The staff team lacks diversity and so miss having those able to share their cultural experience and difference. The foster care advisor role is particularly valued by all, people with considerable experience as foster carers providing support to fostering families and supervising social workers. The out-of-hours service is robust, with carers noting that there is always 'Someone on the end of the phone who knows them and their child'. Staff and panel members are suitably qualified and experienced for their respective roles. The agency has a plan in place to address vacancies both in the short and longer term. The acting manager also hopes to increase the diversity of the staff team.

Staff report that they are encouraged and funded to identify and attend courses that support their supervision of carers and their own development. Managers provide staff with regular formal and informal supervision, and lead weekly team meetings. However, the impact and effectiveness of managers are not well evidenced in relation to the quality of supervision. For example, supervision records lack challenge and reflection, discussion of the impact of the training on practice, and do not include a focus on safeguarding although there is evidence of case discussion. Staff appraisals are being undertaken, including panel member review. However, records of appraisal

do not demonstrate evaluation or challenge of practice. The good practice found in the appraisal conducted by the operations manager, presents a more robust model of appraisal and supervision to secure continued staff development.

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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.