

Select FosterCare Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Select FosterCare Services is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Redbridge, East London. The service has been in operation since 2014. The fostering service specialises in providing the following types of foster care: long term, short term, bridging, respite, emergency, and child and parent placements. The service also offers placements for children who have disabilities and/or complex health needs.

The agency's statement of purpose identifies one of the service's key aims to, 'promote and safeguard the welfare of children who are "looked after" to ensure they have positive experiences of childhood and are able to move successfully towards their independence.'

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 13 approved fostering households with 15 children and 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 who have 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: **good**

The fostering service provides good-quality placements, and the outcomes for children are very positive. Children develop secure attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. Children thrive in their placements, and unplanned endings are rare. Children develop good self-esteem and self-confidence. Children looked after receive personalised care that meets their individual needs and they are safe. The service pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity.

The recruitment and preparation of foster carers are robust and thorough. The fostering agency approves skilled, experienced foster carers who are able to offer good-quality placements that meet the needs of children. The fostering agency provides good support, training and supervision to foster carers. Carers feel valued and appreciate the investment that the agency has made in them to promote positive experiences and outcomes for children.

The service promotes well the educational achievement and healthy lifestyles of children. The service is particularly skilled in meeting the specialist needs of children living with disabilities. Children make good educational progress; GCSE results for some have been impressive, and older young people have gone on to attend university. Children enjoy a range of leisure and recreational activities of their choice.

The fostering service encourages children to be involved in making decisions about their lives, and the service makes reasonable attempts to consult with them. Children have good opportunities to have safe contact with their parents, siblings, and significant others, when it is in their best interest and safe for them to do so. Foster carers support older young people to develop key practical skills that promote their independence in preparation for adulthood.

Foster carers work in close collaboration with other professionals and made valid contributions to planning and decision-making for children. Staff work effectively with external partners to ensure that services meet the needs of children and that they are safe.

The management of the fostering service has improved since last year's inspection, but is not yet strong. Leaders and managers are passionate and committed to promoting the best possible outcomes for children. However, management review and the efficient monitoring of the service require improvement as the service

continues to grow and strives to be a service of excellence.

Areas of improvement

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meet(s) the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement | Due date |
|--|------------|
| Regulation 35(2011) (1) The registered person must 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. | 01/02/2017 |
| Regulation 35 (2011) (3) The system referred to in paragraph (1) (above) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. | 01/02/2017 |
| Regulation 4 (2011) (a) The provider must keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide. | 01/02/2017 |

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that fostering households understand the nature of records maintained

and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files. Ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record-keeping and take action when needed. (National minimum standard 26.2)

- Implement an effective strategy to ensure that there are sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. In particular, the fostering service should develop and launch its new website. (National minimum standard 13.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**

Children benefit from the service's strong focus on promoting good outcomes. Their overall experiences while in placement are very positive. Children develop strong attachments with their families and have a sense of belonging. One child, when asked about his foster family said, 'It's the best family in the world. I just love my mum's smile, especially when I make her laugh. She really loves me.'

Children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs well and is in accordance with local authority care planning. Children live in stable, secure environments and enjoy sound relationships with their foster carers, who, in turn, clearly enjoy caring for them. A foster carer told the inspector, 'I never give up on the children, despite what anyone says. You stick by them and go the extra mile, no matter what.'

Children benefit from the service's careful placement negotiations and placement starts. Introductions between children and their prospective foster carers are carefully and sensitively coordinated. Children have the opportunity to learn about the families about to care for them, as each fostering household has a written profile, which is shared with children. This helps to settle them in from the outset and enhances placement success. The fostering service's matching process is sound, and children experience strong attachments. As a result, placements are sustained successfully and unplanned endings do not occur.

Children know staff of the fostering service well. This helps them to share readily their views and opinions about their placements and a range of other issues. The fostering service is keen to improve its engagement with children, and, in particular, for children to help to shape the development of the service. Since the last inspection, the role of the children's champion has evolved. Children benefit from having an established dedicated worker: the agency's family support worker. This role involves working directly with children and young people. The post holder is in a unique position to ask children what they think of the service and their ideas to improve services. The children's champion describes her role as being 'the open ear of the agency', in place to hear and convey different perspectives. Children receive good information about how to make complaints. Since the last inspection, no child has made a complaint about the service.

The fostering service meets children's identity needs. Staff explore issues of equality and diversity and ensure that placements support any identity needs. Children have

increased self-confidence, self-esteem and an understanding of their heritage. The agency's matching process carefully considers age, gender, race, disability, geographical location and linguistic needs. Foster carers support children to attend places of worship if they so wish.

Children and young people live in healthy environments where there is good promotion of their physical, emotional and social well-being. They have excellent access to primary healthcare services and receive advice and support from specialist services when this is required, for example, to manage health issues such as diabetes. Staff's documented health plans ensure that young people gain the advice, support and treatment that they need.

The fostering agency has a number of placements that care for children living with disability and/or complex health issues. These children receive excellent care that meets their holistic needs, and which addresses issues of disability expertly. Comments on the looked after children's review of a child previously believed to be of a non-verbal state included, 'F was looking at African movies and seems to enjoy the conversations, often repeating them several times.' This is an illustration of the significant progress that some children who have disability are able to make while in placement with very skilled foster carers.

The fostering service also meets children's emotional and mental health needs. A number of children receive regular services via child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Children and their families benefit significantly from the agency's consultant therapist, who offers support to placements through advice and practical assistance, particularly in relation to behavioural management issues. This helps to sustain placements where challenging behaviour features and to promote placement stability and success.

All children are engaged in learning activities as the service promotes educational attainment and success. Most attend school or college very regularly, and are making good progress from their original starting points. Some have enjoyed remarkable success at GCSE level, while some older young people have gone on to attend university. Foster carers are strong advocates for their children's education success and are very much involved in promoting this ethos. Staff of the fostering service acknowledge and celebrate children's academic and more general achievements. This acts as further motivation for children and young people to aim high in their ambitions.

Children engage in a wide range of physical, social and religious activities that are of their choosing. Typically, these include sport, attendance at local youth clubs and involvement in the arts, music and dance. Most enjoy family holidays with their foster families, sometimes abroad. In addition, children and their families very much enjoy

social events and activities organised and funded by the fostering agency. Currently, plans are in place for families to attend the local pantomime in December.

Children have good access to their brothers and sisters, family members and others when it is safe for them to do so. The fostering agency manages arrangements for contact carefully, ensuring that there is a consistent focus on the impact of contact and that arrangements are always in the best interests of children.

The preparation of older young people for adulthood is good. They benefit from the input of their foster carers and the fostering staff that help to prepare them to manage their lives more independently. Young people have the opportunity to explore and develop skills focused on healthy eating, budgeting, household chores and their own self-care. A good illustration of this is a young woman, previously dependent upon others for all personal care tasks, progressing to manage successfully for herself intimate care tasks during her menstruation. All involved, including the young woman herself, acknowledge this is as being a very significant development in her move towards independence.

Staff and foster carers contribute well to pathway planning. The fostering service has 'staying put' policies in place to support former children looked after to remain in their existing placements if they so wish.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**

The fostering service registered with Ofsted in 2014. This is its second full inspection. The service continues to build on its efforts to recruit more foster carers in order to offer a diverse range of placements, as outlined in the statement of purpose. Since the last inspection, the service has appointed a marketing officer to increase the agency's pool of existing approved foster carers. Currently, a number of new foster care assessments are underway. There is a recruitment strategy in place to help to identify prospective foster carers. The service's website, however, is not yet complete and is due to be re-launched. Managers accept that access to an operational website will be an efficient method to attract higher numbers of prospective foster care applicants.

In addition to the marketing officer, the agency has secured a number of other specialist staff to enhance the skills of foster carers and the staff team in order to address the differing and often challenging needs of children. Since the last inspection, a family therapist is now available to work with staff and directly with

foster families to explore and help to resolve placement difficulties: in particular, the sometimes extreme behaviour of children. The employment of a support worker provides children with creative opportunities to express themselves and to share their opinions about placements. Children, foster carers and staff continue to benefit from the input of social workers on the staff team who have specialist skills and knowledge of working with children and young people who have disability and complex health needs.

Staff's completion of foster carer assessments have significantly improved since the last inspection. Increased management overview and targeted support for assessors have resulted in robust assessments that contain well-triangulated, evidence-based information, which is explicit in outlining how applicants meet the required competencies.

The fostering service's preparation, support and training of foster carers are effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of those they look after and are skilled in meeting identified needs.

Foster carers receive a good range of training that helps them to care safely for very vulnerable children. The fostering service's training programme has improved since the last inspection and includes specialist subject matter that is more challenging. This includes training specific to those caring for children who have disabilities, achieving stable placements and attachment and secure base. The fostering service has made a significant investment in the training of foster carers, ensuring that they receive high-quality training to support their safe and appropriate care of children.

The support of foster carers is excellent, and they highlight the support that they receive from the entire staff team as being exceptional. Foster carers feel listened to and appreciate the open culture of the organisation where 'everyone is valued'. A good illustration of this is the service's current plans to secure a second office base in the South London area, as requested by foster carers living in this area. Many foster carers describe the organisation as 'more like a family, than a business', and an organisation 'that really care[s]'. One of the directors commented, 'If my carers are happy, I'm happy.' Staff complete frequent supervisory visits that comprehensively review and challenge placement issues as they relate to all parties.

The annual review of foster carers is effective. The newly appointed independent reviewing officer is an experienced, independent social worker who manages this process robustly and efficiently. This ensures that fostering panel members have full and comprehensive information to enable them to assess the continued suitability of approved foster carers.

The previous inspection highlighted a number of concerns about the operation of the agency's fostering panel. Since this time, there have been noted improvements to

the fostering panel that have resulted in the effective and efficient management of panel recommendations about prospective and approved foster carers. The constitution of the central list has changed to include key representatives from the field of fostering. This includes a former child looked after. The backgrounds of panel members are now more diverse and reflective of the community that the service seeks to serve. Members of the central list have access to panel training, and the administration of panel meetings is sound.

Foster carers understand the importance of working in partnership with the fostering service and other professionals and do so well. Foster carers confirm, and case files evidence, effective partnership working between staff, foster carers and other involved professionals. A child's local authority social worker commented, 'The staff keep me updated, and my siblings [in placement] are having positive experiences. The foster carer is very experienced; her training and support [are] good [and] child focused. I would recommend this fostering agency.' The fostering service is to review effective systems that encourage and solicit feedback from stakeholders. This is important to ensure that the views and opinions of users have influence on shaping the service.

The fostering agency's matching processes are effective. This ensures that placements meet children's identified needs and placement objectives. The service ensures that comprehensive information is available from placing authorities to help them and foster carers to agree to appropriate placements. Foster carers are very much involved in this process.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**

The fostering service considers effective safeguarding as a priority for all placements and holds this ethos central to its entire function and operation. Foster carers are committed to developing positive relationships with children, and the agency operates a culture of openness and trust. Staff ensure that they consistently review and monitor each child's safety and well-being throughout their placement.

Staff ensure that comprehensive placement plans address any changing needs and that strategies are in place to help to reduce risk-taking behaviour. For example, staff complete risk assessments early after placement, to start to help identify known and potential risks to children's safety. Children benefit from the agency's clear and robust child protection policies and procedures that help to keep them safe.

The assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers have a strong focus on child protection, and this supports their safe care of vulnerable children. Family safe care policies lay the foundations to how fostering households will keep children safe. Unannounced home visits are another mechanism by which to monitor the safety of children. Foster carers and staff are active participants in multi-agency professionals' meetings convened to address young people's suspected or actual involvement in child sexual exploitation, or situations in which there are persistent episodes of young people going missing. Staff support foster carers to take prompt and appropriate action to help to reduce such incidents. A foster carer stated on her annual review form, 'It can be very discouraging trying to safeguard a young person who doesn't want to be safeguarded. When [X] comes home, we show her love and concern and never judge her.'

Allegations against foster carers are rare. Since the last inspection, there has been one such allegation made by a child. Staff managed the incident appropriately and in accordance with child protection procedures, ensuring that appropriate support was available to both the child and those subject to the allegation.

The fostering service has good systems in place that ensure that the vetting, selection and recruitment of staff and panel members are thorough and promote the safety of children. This is an improvement to the recruitment processes evidenced during the last inspection.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement**

The leadership and management of the fostering agency at this inspection demonstrate the continued ambition and commitment to offer, provide and maintain quality foster care placements that expertly meet the needs of children. Despite very keen efforts, there remain areas identified for improvement if this ambition is to be realised.

Leaders are yet to devise and maintain effective and efficient systems that provide managers with a sufficient overview of the service's function and operation. To date, and as highlighted in the last inspection report, managers have failed to produce a regulation 35 quality of care monitoring report, as required. This is imperative as the service continues to develop and the fostering task becomes increasingly demanding. Leaders have also failed to evidence the agency's internal quality assurance review, which equally provides an overview and evaluation of key aspects of the fostering service's function and operation. Such systems assist in highlighting what is working

well and identify areas for remedial action. This is a repeat requirement.

Staff have been unsuccessful in ensuring that all foster carers' written logs are current and provide an accurate and up-to-date account of placement progress and issues. Managers indicate that, while staff continue to challenge this practice and offer training to address this shortfall, poor and incomplete recording by some foster carers continues. The impact of this is significant. As a result, children may not have access to a full and complete record of their experiences in care, which is important to their understanding of decision-making and key events in their lives.

Another consequence of foster carers' poor recording of daily logs is that it impacts negatively on managers' ability to track individual children's progress in key areas. This is because the newly developed outcomes tracking tool links with foster carers' evaluation of children's daily presentation and activity. The tracking of children's progress and outcomes is therefore not as effective as it might be.

Leaders and managers are well qualified and experienced to manage the service. The registered manager is a qualified social worker with extensive experience of fostering and managing staff. The registered manager is currently completing national vocational qualification (NVQ) management training at level 5. There are now clear lines of accountability, and managers and staff are clear about staff roles and responsibilities. This was not the case at the last inspection. Social work staff are largely qualified and experienced; those who are not receive excellent support and supervision from managers. The entire team is skilled, highly motivated and industrious. Team members share similar enthusiasm, drive and ambition for the development of the service to managers and leaders.

The fostering service is well resourced and is financially viable. The investment of additional staff and specialist workers is evidence of this, as is the agency's support and investment in staff completing formal qualifications. The agency is currently supporting a staff member to compete a Master's degree in social work, while the registered manager is undertaking further formal management studies. The agency is currently attempting to secure additional premises in the South London area. The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the fostering service to meet its aims and objectives.

Stakeholders and interested parties have access to comprehensive information about the fostering service. The agency's statement of purpose is an informative document that outlines well the services and facilities that it aims to provide. Some minor revision is required to reflect accurately the roles of staff members. The service produces two children's guides for the use of children looked after. The guide for primary school-aged children requires revision to ensure that the information is easy to read and is user friendly.

The fostering service has a clear vision for its developmental path and continues to demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that children receive good-quality and safe care and that they make positive progress. Shortfalls identified in the leadership and management of the service require resolution, but do not impact negatively on the safety or welfare of children.

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.