

# Ryancare Fostering Ltd

Ryancare Fostering Limited  
Oak House, 5a Wellington Road, Wanstead, London E11 2AN  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Ryancare Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency based in Wanstead, East London. The service has been in operation since 2002, and joined two other independent fostering agencies in 2008. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for individual and sibling group placements, emergency placements and short- and long-term placements. The agency also provides parent and child placements.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 21 approved fostering households with 35 children in placement.

**Inspection dates:** 26 February to 2 March 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 2 February 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The service provides good-quality care and the outcomes for children are positive.
- Children make good progress and have positive experiences. They enjoy a range

of activities and have fun.

- The fostering service's matching process is effective. Placements are stable and children's individual needs are well met.
- Children have a strong sense of belonging with their foster families.
- The fostering service's safeguarding systems are sound. Children receive safe care and are protected from harm and abuse.
- Children are able to express their views and opinions and they influence the day-to-day care they receive.
- The 'children's champion' promotes children's involvement in shaping the service.
- The service's preparation of potential foster carers is sound.
- The support and supervision of foster carers is good.
- The fostering service provides excellent training opportunities for foster carers.
- The staff receive good support and supervision from their managers.
- Foster carers are part of a team working with the child and they contribute well to the care-planning and decision-making processes.
- The leadership and management of the agency are strong and the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.
- The fostering panel is well organised and efficiently run.
- The fostering service's staff work in partnership with external professionals effectively.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The recruitment of foster carers is not effective. The number of approved foster carers has reduced since the last inspection.
- There are significant gaps in some foster carers' daily recording of placement activities. Records are not consistently kept up to date, and do not accurately reflect children's experiences and some key events that occur.
- The vetting and recruitment processes for some fostering panel members and support staff are insufficiently robust.
- The agency should ensure that all foster carers complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of their approval.
- The agency should appoint a panel member whose area of expertise is children's physical health.
- The agency should review the format of foster carers' support groups.
- The agency should provide staff with additional support and training when they complete the new foster carer assessment.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet 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
<p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that—</p> <p>(a) the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a)).</p> <p>In particular, that the provider ensures that daily records of foster carers are kept up to date, and that foster carers promptly inform staff and others of key events.</p>	01/06/2018
<p>(3) For the purpose of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>(a) is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>(b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>(c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	01/06/2018

### Recommendations

- The fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. (NMS 13.1)
- Peer support, foster carer associations and/or self-help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported (NMS 21.4). In particular, that the provider reviews the support group meeting format. This is to include meetings that are sometimes solely facilitated by foster carers.
- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)

- The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for (NMS 14.8). In particular, that the provider considers recruiting to the fostering panel a representative experienced in the field of children's physical health.
- Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. (NMS 11.3)
- Where a child requires it, the children's guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, e.g. translation into another language. (NMS 16.6)
- There is a good-quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service (NMS 23.1). This relates to staff training in the service's foster carer assessment framework and assessment tool.

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive good-quality of care while living with their foster carers. As a result, they have positive experiences and generally make good progress. They receive safe, personalised care that meets their needs. Children largely share sound relationships with their foster carers, who are fully committed to supporting children to meet their full potential. Children feel loved and well cared for, and most have a strong sense of belonging. A young person told the inspector, 'I love my mum. She's nice. Everything is good; she helps me with everything.' An independent reviewing officer commented in a child's review for children looked after, '[This child] is very popular in his placement and everyone loves him.'

Children and young people are cared for in accordance with their written care plans. They feel listened to and have opportunities to participate in placement decision-making. They are encouraged to make choices about contact arrangements, recreational activities and whether or not to attend places of worship. Children receive good information about how to make complaints, but do not do so.

Children have good opportunities to share their views, wishes and opinions. The children's champion continues to develop strategies for enhancing the participation of children in influencing the shape of the service. The provision of key information and consultation documents in languages that some children collectively speak will benefit children. The service facilitates events and fun days to obtain feedback. It distributes annual service questionnaires and invites children to be involved in a number of initiatives, such as developing a welcome pack for children who are new to foster care.

There is a formal matching process, which is supported by the work of a centralised placements team. This is to ensure that there is effective matching. The process is robust and includes a 'SWOT' (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the proposed placement. Staff record detailed background information that has been shared with them by local authorities. This helps to promote stable, successful placements that meet children's needs. Foster carers are very much involved in this process.

Children who are new in placement are welcomed sensitively, and benefit from careful care planning. In some instances, particularly where the placement has not been an emergency one, children have introductory visits with their foster families. This is to help to settle children into their new surroundings. However, the agency does not consistently provide children with foster carer profiles. These are useful in helping to prepare children for their new families.

Children lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers promptly register them with primary care services, they have annual medical assessments for children looked after and their immunisations are kept up to date. Children access specialist services when required. These include a range of paediatric services, Great Ormond Street Hospital

expertise and other specialist services which address complex and life-limiting conditions. Expectant mothers in parent and child placements attend antenatal appointments. Children benefit from their foster carers' training in first aid. Foster carers safely administer children's medication.

Children's learning outcomes are good. They make good academic and vocational progress. School attendance is high and educational attainment improves as placements progress. There are effective monitoring systems in place for identifying educational issues and mapping progress. The agency celebrates children's achievements regularly and hosts achievement awards. This is to encourage children's progress.

Children participate in a range of physical and social activities, such as attending youth clubs, sports activities and cadet training. The fostering agency arranges events for children looked after and the birth children of foster carers. Recently, this has included training in internet safety. There are opportunities for the two groups to jointly participate in fun activities.

Children enjoy family holidays and celebrations with their foster families. This promotes their strong sense of belonging. The fostering service regularly facilitates activity programmes during school holidays. These include Christmas festivities, Halloween parties, cinema trips and outings to popular theme parks, zoos and beaches. Staff select older children to participate in specialised residential activities. This is to increase their team-building skills and self-confidence and their exploration of outdoor life. Children also have the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Children's identity needs are well met by the service. For example, they have access to interpreting services; they are encouraged to practice and celebrate their chosen faith; and placements support children to understand their backgrounds and events that have happened to them. As a result, they have a better understanding of, and develop pride in, their heritage. Unaccompanied children seeking asylum are particularly well supported, for example in developing their language skills and attending Home Office appointments.

Foster families offer expert and compassionate care for children living with disabilities and life-limiting conditions. A foster carer said in a review for children looked after, 'We got the devastating results of [the child's] genetic testing, which show he has the same condition that his brother had. We intend to do everything we can to make his life a happy one.'

Children and young people have good access to their siblings, other family members and friends when it is safe for them to do so. Where children do not wish to have contact with their families, staff explore this with them and respect their wishes.

Prospective foster carers making enquiries with the fostering service feel valued and welcomed by the staff team. The assessment process is timely and sensitive to the needs of carers. Foster care assessments are well written and identify the strengths and competencies foster carers have or need to develop. This is to ensure that they

are well equipped to meet the needs of children safely.

Children benefit from partnership working between their foster carers, fostering service staff and other professionals. Communication between professionals is largely effective. This supports the careful coordination of children's care. A local authority social worker commented, 'The communication from the fostering agency I have found to be very efficient. When I haven't been able to make contact with the supervising social worker, someone from the agency has always been very helpful and very quick at responding.' Foster carers are part of the team around the child that is striving to meet children's identified needs. Feedback from local authority staff on children's progress and care planning is largely positive.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

The fostering service's protection of children is good. The staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children are paramount. The service ensures that foster carers are aware of children's vulnerabilities, and are aware of the underlying causes of the behaviours they sometimes exhibit.

Children benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. The agency has designated personnel who advise and provide information about specialist safeguarding areas such as suicide, self-harm and radicalisation. These 'champions' are responsible for the training in these areas and raising the awareness of these specific issues at all levels within the organisation.

Children receive clear information about how to make complaints and have opportunities to speak in private with staff from the service. Staff complete unannounced visits annually to foster carers' homes to promote further the safety of placements.

Staff and foster carers devise 'family safe care' policies and risk assessments to help keep children safe and alert those working with them to actual or potential harm or risk. Staff regularly update risk assessments and these have an influence on the overall 'risk rating' of placements. Managers very carefully monitor risk assessments to ensure that risks are known, and that there are effective strategies in place to help curb risk-taking behaviour.

Foster carers receive clear written guidance and good training to help them keep children safe from harm and abuse. Managers of the fostering service monitor and have a good overview of, and insight into, all safeguarding matters. They take effective action to promote the protection of children and young people.

Some young people go missing and are at risk of child sexual exploitation. When this is the case, foster carers and staff manage these incidents promptly and effectively. Foster carers go to great lengths to ensure the safe return of young people who are missing. They work well with external professionals such as substance misuse workers and children's mentors. This promotes the effective protection of children

and young people. Foster carers are familiar with relevant safeguarding policies and protocols, and adhere to them. However, some foster carers are not sufficiently prompt in alerting professionals when key events occur, such as young people going missing and other incidents. This was the case for one young person.

Children rarely make allegations against their foster carers. When this occurs, staff manage allegations sensitively and in accordance with agency policies and procedures. Staff seek advice from and maintain effective communication with the designated officer and the child's social worker.

The fostering service's recruitment and vetting of panel members and support staff is not consistently robust. In some cases, managers failed to obtain completed application forms, conduct interviews, or obtain two written references for the posts applied for. This does not confirm that all members of the panel and all support staff are suitable to work with vulnerable children.

The recruitment, assessment, preparation and support of foster carers are strongly focused on keeping children safe. Managers and leaders monitor, reflect on and report on all safeguarding incidents. This is to ensure that foster carers are well equipped to care safely for vulnerable children and young people.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The leadership and management of the fostering service are effective. Leaders of the service are ambitious for change and many aspects of the fostering service's leadership and management are strong. The service has clear strategic plans in place to improve practice further and set the service's future direction.

The fostering service currently has 21 approved fostering households. This means that there has been a reduction in the number of approved foster carers since the previous inspection, three years ago. The service is yet to develop and implement an effective recruitment strategy that will attract and secure a larger pool of foster carers. This is important if the service is to provide foster care placements that meet the diverse needs of children.

The registered manager is a qualified social worker, and is highly skilled and experienced. This enables her to manage the service efficiently and with positive effect. The staff team and other managers are enthusiastic about her approach to leadership and practice. A staff member said of the registered manager, 'I really like our new manager. She's so calm and helpful. She'll go out of her way to give you the support you need. I can then do the right thing.' Another member of the team said, 'She's happy to do joint visits if I need her to. She's approachable and makes herself available, even when she's off. She doesn't switch off.'

The staff are appropriately qualified, and are committed to providing good support for children and their foster families. This is the overwhelming view of foster carers. One foster carer told the inspector, 'I've learnt lots of things because I get good support. These Ryancare social workers are of a different calibre. High quality.' Staff

enjoy supporting placements. A member of the team said, 'The best thing about my job? Seeing young people make progress, making a difference. I know it sounds cheesy, but it's true.'

Staff receive excellent support through effective and consistent training, supervision, appraisals and reflective practice. They have access to a range of relevant internal and external training opportunities. The staff particularly appreciate training from external experts and they acknowledged recent training from the Safer London Team as being exemplary. Some social workers said they would benefit from increased support and training in using the agency's new foster carer assessment tool.

The staff's support and supervision of foster carers is excellent and their communication with foster carers is frequent and meaningful. Staff make themselves available to support foster carers emotionally and practically. This is a clear strength of the service and foster carers are appreciative of this approach. However, some foster carers said that they would like managers to review the format of foster carers' support groups. Some carers indicated that these groups are led by staff and are often 'too businesslike'. This is an issue that foster carers raised at the last inspection. Foster carers have access to the agency's confidential counselling service. This is in place to support foster carers to reflect upon and improve their emotional well-being and resilience.

Foster carers have access to an excellent range of training opportunities relating to childcare and the fostering task. Foster carers are largely positive about the range and quality of the training courses they undertake. These include for example, safeguarding training, therapeutic attachment, child sexual exploitation, manipulative behaviour, radicalisation and siblings in care. Not all foster carers have completed the required Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of their approval. This was also the case at the previous inspection. Foster carers have access to an extensive range of online training courses. Staff select experienced foster carers to complete an accredited 12-month 'advanced' training programme. A foster carer said of this programme, 'It's just brilliant!'

Fostering service staff maintain good records of placement activities. However, foster carers indicate that maintaining electronic daily logs is a significant challenge for them. Many say that they struggle to meet the service's recording requirements. For some foster carers, there are considerable gaps in their recording. This on occasion has led to a delay in key events and information being communicated to staff and others. This is not in the best interests of children. Managers acknowledge that this is a significant shortfall. Staff continue to offer intensive support to some foster carers to address this issue.

The service's fostering panel operates effectively and promotes safe and stable placements. Panel members are drawn from a diverse range of professional backgrounds. However, as identified at the last inspection, the service is yet to appoint a panel member whose area of expertise is children's physical health. The panel undertakes clear and appropriate analysis of the work presented at panel meetings. The administration of the fostering panel is very efficient and there are

training opportunities for those on the fostering service's central list. This supports panel members' practice.

The fostering service has extensive and effective monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. These include, for example, the tracking of individual children's progress and outcomes; the review and revision of key policies and procedures; and the review of child protection issues.

Managers complete quarterly overview reports for the organisation's senior managers, and produce quality of care reports as required by regulation. Leaders and managers meet regularly and have good insight into the quality of the operation and functioning of the fostering service. The service's premises and administrative mechanisms support the efficient operation of the fostering service.

The statement of purpose provides stakeholders and interested parties with information that outlines the aims and objectives of the fostering service. Information about the service is available to children in the children's guide.

The fostering service is well organised. Identified shortfalls do not impact negatively on the safety or welfare of children. The service has realistic plans in place to support its efforts to continue to offer quality care, ensure good outcomes for children and make continued improvements to the service.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC041354

**Registered provider:** Ryancare Fostering Limited

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Faversham, Kent ME13 0SH

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## **Inspector**

Sandra Jacobs-Walls: social care inspector



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