

Rainbow Fostering Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Seka Graovac
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	29 January 2007

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure 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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Rainbow Fostering Service Ltd was established in 1998 by the present Managing Director who is the Responsible Individual for the service. The Assistant Director is registered with Ofsted as the manager for the service. The agency's main objective is to provide a service to children and young people who are in need of foster care. The service on offer includes long, short term, respite and specialist foster care placements as well as extra tuition to fostered children provided by a qualified teacher in the agency's own Saturday School.

Summary

This inspection was announced and covered assessment of all key National Minimum Standards. As the agency's quality rating at the previous inspection was good and in accordance with Ofsted guidance, the inspector used the reduced methodology. The fostering panel was not observed on this occasion, but the minutes of the last three fostering panel proceedings were examined. The inspector visited two foster families. The service achieves good outcomes for fostered children in the areas of Being Healthy, Positive Contribution, Enjoying and Achieving. Organisation and Staying Safe have been assessed as satisfactory. Four requirements have been identified in relation to the standards regarding approval of foster carers, the reviews of their approval, the matching process and the records of the fostering panel proceedings. The overall quality rating of satisfactory has been reached as the identified weaknesses were counterbalanced by good processes that the agency has in place.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

No requirements and three recommendations were identified at the previous inspection report. The agency has successfully implemented all the given recommendations. More training opportunities have been offered to foster carers and some training sessions have been repeated in response to the expressed training need and interest. The agency has introduced written evaluation of the educational outcomes for children who attend the Saturday School.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The Rainbow fostering service has good processes in place to ensure that the health of fostered children is promoted. Foster carers receive training which has health related learning outcomes, such as clearly identifying areas of the child's health that need to be monitored and reviewed, involving children in looking after their health, and demonstrating an ability to promote the child's health and general wellbeing including mental health. Further written guidance for foster carers in relation to health and medication is available in the handbook that they receive from the agency. Appropriate health related records are kept and this aspect of care is discussed at the regular supervising social worker's visits to the foster carer's home.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Both registered persons are qualified and have many years of experience in fostering and management. The staff who work for the agency are either suitably qualified or work under appropriate supervision. The recruitment checks ensure their suitability to work with children and to undertake fostering tasks on behalf of the agency. The agency's fostering panel meets on a regular basis to provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment and terms of approval of foster carers. The chair and the vice-chair of the panel are independent. The other independent members include a care leaver and advisors in education and health. Written records of the panel proceedings for November 2007, December 2007 and January 2008 were read at the inspection. The agency keeps separate minutes for the business part of the fostering panel meeting and decision sheets for each foster carer or foster parents, whose potential or actual fostering practice was considered. Shortfalls in the information contained within the decision sheets were identified. The reasons for the recorded recommendations of the fostering panel in relation to the approval of foster carers were not always clearly recorded. For example, in one decision sheet, it was written for the approval to be 'amended from two to three children'. No reasons for this amendment have been recorded as discussed at the panel meeting. The service manager explained that this was not an amendment, but the continuation of the same terms of approval and that the information written in the decision sheet was not correct. In a different decision sheet, the approval was recommended for one or two children of the particular 'age range same gender', although there was only one bedroom available for fostering. The management explained that the same gender actually meant siblings. In some instances, it was recorded that the fostering panel members asked for additional information. This included details of prospective foster carer's chronology or chronology of placements and their outcomes when approving foster carers who had previously fostered for another agency. From the contents of the minutes, the recommendations were made without the additional information being provided. While discussing particular cases and giving feedback at the end of the inspection process, the panel members from Rainbow Fostering Service acknowledged that on occasions, some of the discussions that took place at the panel were not fully recorded. The approved foster carers sign the foster care agreement with the agency that specifies various matters and obligations, including the terms of the foster parent's approval. The form used by the agency has been reviewed to include all the information as specified in legislation. The agency endeavours to review the approval of foster carers after first six months of having had a placement or within the first year of fostering. Subsequent reviews are done on an annual basis. This is achieved most of the time. However, in some instances, the reviews were late. One couple who was approved in April 2006, still did not have their first review conducted or booked, at the time of this inspection. It was also evident from the records, that the placement chronology and the outcomes of the placements were not always made available to the panel members when reviewing the foster carer's terms of approval. In addition, although the agency was aware and appropriately dealt with a safeguarding concern relating to a foster carer, this information was not brought to the panel's attention as they were reviewing their continuous approval. Once again, the management stated that the issue was discussed at the panel, but not recorded. The inspector visited two foster carers and it was evident that the placements they had were appropriately matched. However, one fostering couple in their first year of fostering, looked after four children, none of whom were within their terms of approval. The agency had obtained the panel chair's approval for the urgent placements to go ahead, but then failed to carry out the recommendation to bring the foster couple back to the panel to consider the variation of their terms of approval. One young person lived with these foster carers for approximately five months and therefore could not constitute being an emergency placement. At the carers' first review, the panel recommended to continue with their initial

terms of approval. No changes were made. Nothing was documented in the fostering panel minutes in support of any discussions taking place regarding the approved age range. The policies and procedures that safeguard children are included in the foster carer's handbook and foster carers receive relevant training. The agency conducts annual health and safety checks of the foster carers' home. Safe caring guidance is developed for each child placed. The records of supervising social workers visits show that the safeguarding of the children is discussed and monitored on a regular basis.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency is committed to promoting equality. Both staff and foster carers come from diverse backgrounds and some are multilingual. The agency is seeking to approve more white foster carers in order to better reflect the needs of children being referred. Applying anti-discriminatory practice by promoting diversity and challenging discrimination is identified as one of the main learning outcomes of the training that foster carers receive. Further training is available on how to meet the racial and cultural needs of children in trans-racial placements and also how best to look after children from asylum and refugee backgrounds. The agency has the Rainbow Plus service that provides enhanced foster care to children with disabilities and special needs. The inspector visited one of these placements and found that the carers had the necessary knowledge and skills to appropriately support the child's progress, confidence and self-esteem. While the agency provides short-term break service in principle, none have been actually provided since the previous inspection. Foster carers are appropriately supported to facilitate children's learning and educational achievements. This aspect of foster care is regularly monitored through supervising social workers' visits. The Rainbow Fostering Service ensures that the foster carers provide an environment in which education and learning as well as play and enjoyment are valued. The agency's own Saturday School is available to help children with subjects, such as mathematics, science and English language. The agency's outreach workers assist foster carers to encourage children to participate in the community activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency's foster carers are aware of the importance and value of children maintaining safe contact with their birth families and friends. The contact arrangements are discussed at the placement agreement meeting and monitored through supervising social worker's visits. Their perceived impact on the child is also monitored through foster carers' written monthly reports. The children's own social workers are given remote access to the child's files held by the agency. Children's views are taken in account across the service provision. They are encouraged to attend and participate in various meetings including placement agreement meetings and reviews of foster carers. Their views are also sought and recorded in the supervising social worker's monthly visit records. Where practicable, children are offered introductory visits to their prospective foster care family, before the placement is agreed. All children who responded to the Ofsted survey marked 'always' for their answer, when asked if their carers listened and took notice of their opinions. Foster carers meet on a regular basis to share their experience and views amongst themselves and with the agency.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency's Statement of Purpose accurately describes the service. There are two formats of the guide for children about the provision that are suitable for younger and older children. The agency has an adequate number of qualified social workers as well as other staff to meet the needs of the fostering service as described in the Statement of Purpose. Staff belong to different teams and have detailed job descriptions. Lines of accountability are clear and staff are appropriately supported and managed. The level of management responsibility is in accordance with the qualifications and experience of the relevant staff members. Team meetings take place on a regular basis. Both the foster carers and the agency staff who spoke to the inspector described their experience of the Rainbow Fostering Service in positive terms, such as friendly, helpful, and reliable. The Rainbow Fostering Service has achieved re-accreditation of its Investors in People Award. In addition to the Registered Manager who is responsible for day to day management of the fostering services, the agency has a Finance Manager and an external Head of Policy and Training. Policies are clear and compliant with legislation and good fostering practice. Foster carers are offered appropriate training with defined learning outcomes and given the additional guidance that is included in the Foster Care Handbook and Health and Safety Handbook. In line with the agency's strategy for working with and supporting carers, the supervising social workers conduct visits to the foster carers' homes on a regular, monthly basis. Good records of these visits that demonstrate the agency's commitment to facilitate positive outcomes for children as described in Every Child Matters document, as well as to provide appropriate support to foster carers are kept. Monitoring of the placements and foster carer's performance includes agreeing the numerical ratings for different outcomes, identifying strengths and development areas. The agency is proactive in assisting foster carers to obtain the National Vocational Qualification in Caring for Children and Young People. The agency keeps its records electronically stored in the e-care software package that the Managing Director has been involved in developing. Separate records are kept for foster carers, children, staff and significant matters, such as complaints and allegations. Monitoring is mainly done through good staff supervision and reporting system. While the Managing Director confirmed that the electronic recording system can produce data in order to assist monitoring the matters listed in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002, this has not been utilised, currently. The majority of the required records are appropriately kept and monitored. However, the Registered Persons have failed to identify and address the issues regarding the quality and accuracy of the records of the fostering panel proceedings prior to this inspection, as identified under Staying Safe section of this report. A business plan for 2007 - 2009 is in place. It identifies the expansion of the service without compromising the quality of the provision as the main challenge for the company.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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6	ensure that each foster carers' review takes place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 29.2)	11 May 2008
6	ensure that all information necessary in order to review whether the person continues to be suitable as to act as a foster parent and his household continues to be suitable is made available to the fostering panel when considering the continuation of the approval. (Regulations 29.3.a, 29.4 and 29.5)	29 February 2008
8	ensure that the placements are consistent with the terms of the approval of the foster carers except in the case of the emergency or immediate placement. In that case the appropriate procedure must be followed to ensure the welfare of the child. (Regulations 11.a and 34.1.b)	29 February 2008
30	ensure that the fostering panel has access to all relevant information about the prospective foster carer and their family before making recommendation regarding their approval and that this, as well as the reasons for the recommendations can be evidenced from the written records of the proceedings of the fostering panel. (Regulation 25.2 and 28.2.b, Schedule 3)	29 February 2008

Recommendations

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

- review the agency's system for monitoring of matters listed in Schedule 7. (National Minimum Standard 4)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.