

Solutions Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Suzanne Young
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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

Solutions fostering agency is part of Priory Solutions based in Ross-on-Wye. The agency employs a small but sufficient level of qualified and experienced staff. A support worker is employed to work closely with children and young people according to individual need. Solutions recruit foster carers from a wide geographical area both in England and Wales and are looking to expand in the Worcestershire and West Midlands area. Solutions fostering agency shares the site with the managerial and administrative offices of Priory Solutions children's homes. Priory Solutions also operate two schools, one in Wales and one in Herefordshire, which children and young people looked after by the agency can access.

Summary

This inspection was an announced inspection and all key standards were inspected. The inspection focused on health needs, individual support and keeping children and young people safe. The inspection also concentrated on how the agency consults with young people. This inspection did not look how the agency prepares young people for adulthood. The outcome area, achieving economic wellbeing, was not inspected. The inspection looked at the progress the agency has made with the requirements made at the last inspection. These related to developing effective monitoring and quality assurance and systems and ensuring all foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker prior to placements being made. A few issues around health information and guidance to foster carers, the procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff, foster placement agreements, reviews of foster carers and consent to medication were noted. The overall rating for this setting is satisfactory with some good practice and outcomes for children being achieved. A strong emphasis is particularly placed on promoting the educational achievement for looked after children.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering agency has implemented most of the statutory requirements required by the last inspection. The outcome of any complaint is now detailed in the Statement of Purpose. The manager has developed systems for the collection and monitoring of matters listed in Schedule 7 and the appropriate agency administration records are now in place. The agency now has its own fostering panel which demonstrates good quality assurance processes in operation. Foster carers are approved by the agency decision maker before any children or young people are placed with them. The foster placement agreement (FPA) however does not fully meet all matters listed in Schedule 6 as it does not state that carers will comply with the terms of their foster carer agreement. The agency has also met most of the recommendations made at the last inspection. Unannounced visits to foster carers are now undertaken, staff are proactive in ensuring children with learning disabilities are aware of the complaints process and health and safety checks are being made and recorded appropriately. The matching process however is still not sufficiently documented and does not evidence how decisions are made and how any gaps in matching will be catered for.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Solutions fostering agency promote children's and young people's health and development. The health and development needs of children and young people in their care are being identified during referral and matching with foster carers although this is not well evidenced in matching documentation. The fostering agency provides good care services which help each child in foster care to receive health care which meets their overall development. Foster carers have access to in-house psychotherapy services which can provide initial and ongoing advice regarding the therapeutic needs for children and young people in their care. Young people's health needs are well met by their foster carers and all are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians. Consent to medication and treatment however is not always in place which could potentially lead to confusion and delay. The agency has given carers guidance to help ensure the promotion of children's and young people's health and wellbeing although this does not include advice on the correct over-the-counter medicines. The guidance with regard to smoking has not been updated in line with recent guidance. Training in health and hygiene issues is provided to foster carers during their pre-approval training and is included in training covering the outcomes in Every Child Matters. All carers are expected to complete a first aid course within the first year of approval.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has developed systems which help ensure the protection and safety of children and young people in their care. Foster carers provide safe and homely environments for the children placed with them and are given clear policies and training in respect of child protection and safe caring. Annual health and safety checks are undertaken. Children are generally well matched with their foster carers and this enables their overall needs to be met. The agency uses a combined foster placement agreement (FPA) and matching form. The matching process is not sufficiently documented on the form. Reasons why the placement is a good match and how any gaps in matching can be over-come is not demonstrated. The form meets most requirements of a FPA although does not specify that the carer must comply with the terms of their foster care agreement (FCA). The agency are not completing all FPAs within required timescales and some respite placements and children and young people transferred from other agencies do not have FPAs in place. This potentially compromises children's and young people's welfare. Foster carers' safe caring policies and risk assessments for high risk activities and for identified need are in place. These help to ensure children are safeguarded within their placements and ensure the individual needs of every child are considered. Safe caring plans however are not cleared with children's and young people's social workers prior to placement to ensure they meet the child's individual needs. The agency has systems in place which generally ensure the appropriate assessment, recruitment and vetting of staff and foster carers. Some members of staff who have transferred within the company have not completed fresh applications and employment histories. Records of interview are not on all files and fresh Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are not always undertaken. The agency has its own fostering panel which has been in operation since November 2007. The panel minutes demonstrate that a comprehensive quality assurance function is being provided by the panel and evidences that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers. The panel will be observed as part of the inspection process later in the year.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency demonstrates a positive attitude to diversity. Children and young people are encouraged to enjoy and achieve as staff and carers are aware of the importance of promoting individual needs within the foster placement. The agency address any issues that arise out of the child's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, faith or belief by offering appropriate support and advice. Young people are supported and encouraged to maintain cultural and religious links and foster carers looking after children from ethnic minority backgrounds are able to access organisations who can provide support with translation and advocacy. Each child and young person looked after by the agency is able to access a support worker to work with them, often away from the foster home, to develop skills and interests and enhance confidence. This is good practice and is valued by both carers and young people. Children and young people also receive good support to meet their educational needs. The agency promotes the educational needs of children and young people and supports children to maximise their potential with good outcomes for children and young people seen. This is a particular strength of the agency. Children and young people are encouraged to achieve at school and within the wider community and the agency produces certificates and gift vouchers for individual achievements. Children and young people attend local schools or special schools where appropriate. Priory Solutions have two registered schools which young people in foster homes may attend if the placing authority requests this. Foster carers work closely with schools to support children in their education often researching and accessing resources themselves. Support workers are able to accompany young people into school with their agreement and stay with them to support and develop their confidence. This is good practice. The agency currently have 100% of children in education. Attendance and educational achievement is closely monitored by the manager

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children and young people's welfare is promoted as staff and carers encourage family and friends contact. Positive contact is promoted through training, carers' supervision sessions and reviews. It also forms part of the foster carers' monthly reports and children's looked-after (LAC) reviews. The agency support carers by helping with transport arrangements and supervising contact between children and their birth families where this is deemed appropriate. The agency has developed consultative processes which allows young people the opportunity to express their views regarding the quality of care provided regarding their day-to-day care. Children and young people are also asked for their views on activities organised by the agency. Children and young people are made aware of how to raise concerns or complaints through the young person's welcome booklet they are given at the start of a placement. The agency has developed good innovative practices to ensure young people with learning disabilities are aware of how to complain and are able to access the agency's complaints procedure.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Solutions fostering agency is organised in a way which delivers an effective service to children, young people and foster carers with some good outcomes for children and young people being achieved. Systems are in place to monitor the outcomes of care provided to children and young people. Child protection concerns and complaints are dealt with appropriately. The agency has

clear lines of accountability which is known to staff and carers. The manager and staff are accessible to carers and young people. The agency employs a small but sufficient level of qualified and experienced staff. A support worker is employed to work closely with children and young people looked after by the agency according to individual need. Support and supervision practices are taking place which ensures that children's care remains appropriate. Staff and carers are receiving formal supervision on a regular basis. Carers are positive about the agency and feel well supported which in turn enables them to effectively support the children and young people who are placed with them. The agency continues to promote quality of care and improve outcomes for children and young people by providing a comprehensive training programme for foster carers. Staff have full access to Priory training which includes 'Foundations for Growth', a home study course. It is planned that carers will have access to this later in the year. The agency uses the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F to assess prospective foster carers. All respite carers are fully assessed in line with Standard 17. Assessment reports are completed to a good standard and test the required qualities, competences and aptitudes of the prospective foster carers. The fostering manager ensures that assessments coming before panel are complete and sufficiently comprehensive. The agency has recently set up its own fostering panel and this has led to several carers' annual reviews not having taken place within 12 months as required. Foster carers, young people and parents are able to understand the aims and objectives of the service through a clear Statement of Purpose, carers' handbook and children's guides. The welcome booklet and children's guide is given to all children looked after by Solutions. These guides are not yet translated into other languages and some young people are not able to understand their content. The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each foster carer and child in foster care. Recording is organised around Every Child Matters outcome headings. This is good practice and helps ensure all those working with children and young people are focussed on improving the outcomes for children and young people. The agency however does not have clear policies and procedures regarding record keeping, the storage of confidential information, including electronic storage and the return of records following the end of a placement. Carers are practising several different recording systems and some are retaining confidential information which could potentially compromise children's and young people's confidentiality.

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
12	ensure carers are provided with clear procedures governing the consent to medical treatment for all children and young people at start of placement. (Regulation 17 (3) (b))	29 February 2008
12	ensure carers are given correct information and guidance to promote children's health and wellbeing. (Regulation 17 (3))	29 February 2008

8	ensure all foster placement agreements are in place within the required timescales for all placements, including respite care. (Regulation 34 (3))	29 February 2008
8	ensure foster placement agreements include all matters listed in Schedule 6. (Regulation 34 (3))	29 February 2008
15	follow clear procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff to ensure children are protected. (Regulation 20)	29 February 2008
16	ensure reviews of carers are implemented within required timescales. (Regulation 29 (2)).	29 February 2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure foster carers understand their role in terms of promoting the health of children by updating the guidance with regard to smoking in line with recent changes. (NMS 12.6)
- demonstrate the matching process giving reasons for making the placement and how gaps in matching can be filled. (NMS 8.4)
- clear foster carers' safe caring plans with children's and young people's social workers prior to placement. (NMS 9.3)
- ensure clear procedures regarding record keeping, the storage of confidential information including electronic storage and the return of records are available and understood by staff and foster carers. (NMS 24.2).

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.