

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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

SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. is an independent fostering agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people. At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing a family placement service to around 55 children and young people with approximately 40 foster carers. The agency offers a range of services to meet the needs of placing authorities, including: emergency; parent and child; and short and long-term placements. In addition to the manager and a principal social worker the agency employs: three supervising social workers; three educational case workers and an education support worker; a health adviser; a placement support worker; and two administrative staff.

Summary

This was an announced inspection of the fostering agency. The purpose of the inspection was to assess how the agency complies with all the key National Minimum Standards and to consider where actions and recommendations made at the last inspection had been addressed. SWIIS Foster Care Ltd. provides a very good service to fostered children. It provides children with safe, well matched foster placements and good outstanding support for children throughout their stay in foster care. The agency is excellent at helping carers meet children's health needs. Children's health is given a high priority and the role of health adviser within the agency ensures that children receive any support necessary. The service is good at providing children with foster carers who are well matched to their needs. Arrangements to provide suitable matches between children and foster carers are good but arrangements for placement agreement meetings are not always robust enough and recording of matching considerations is not always good enough. Good arrangements to promote health and safety and safe caring help keep children safe but arrangements to provide carers with training in dealing with challenging behaviour are not always effective enough. Fostering panel is properly constituted but does not, in every case, receive full and accurate written information about the matters presented to it. The agency ensures that each child's individual needs are identified and supported on an ongoing basis. Disadvantaged children receive very good support from the agency and its well trained and well supported carers. Children's education is a very high priority for the service and children receive excellent support with their education. The agency's educational case workers work hard with carers, schools and placing authorities to ensure children get the continued support they need. The service consults with children well and ensures that they are able to express their views about their care and their foster carers. Foster carers receive very high levels of support and management from the agency. They are provided with good training and the agency is working to develop this further. Foster carers receive excellent support and supervision. The agency works well with children's placing local authorities and communication between all parties is good. Detailed information is retained about children to help ensure that their needs are properly met.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has addressed all the issues identified at the last inspection. An action was required regarding exemptions from the usual fostering limit from the relevant local authority.

Recommendations were made regarding the amount of information the agency gets about children from their placing authorities and how it monitors situations in which children are not visited very often by their social workers. Recommendations were also made regarding safe care policies and unannounced visits to foster carers by their supervising social workers. The agency has responded to these and, as a consequence, children's safety has been improved. The agency has also responded to a recommendation made regarding some of the systems for monitoring and recording its activities. Action taken by the agency means that its systems are more effective in helping promote good outcomes for children.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The agency works very effectively to provide children and young people with very good health care and support. It provides foster carers with good information about children's health needs and makes sure that fostered children are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians in the community. Foster carers and professionals help children to attend any appointments necessary. The agency employs a health adviser who carries out direct work with foster carers and children. One young person said, 'There's a nurse from SWIIS who gives me advice of staying healthy.' The health adviser also liaises between the local authorities' Looked After Children (LAC) nurses and other professionals. In this way the agency is able to ensure that children receive prompt health assessment and support where needed. A young person's social worker said, 'The designated health professional in SWIIS makes all the difference.' This role provides children with excellent support for their health and leads to outstanding provision in this area. For example the adviser has been involved in close monitoring of children's medication and resolved difficulties with health professional experienced by foster carers. The agency considers children's health needs as part of the service's process for matching children with foster carers. Specialist advice is provided to carers about health issues, where necessary, to help ensure that carers are able to meet children's needs. The arrangements regarding who has the authorisation to give consent for children's medical treatment are identified and made clear to foster carers. The agency works with local authorities to ensure that children's annual LAC medical checks take place. The health adviser regularly monitors children's health between these reviews. The agency provides its foster carers with training to help them meet children's health needs. Training in first aid, and other health matters is provided. Training in specific health and disability matters is also provided to foster carers where necessary based on the individual needs of children in placements. For example, carers have received training in autism and mental health. Specialist support for children in areas, such as psychology and psychiatry is available.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency makes sure that foster carers' homes are suitable and safe places for children to live. It carries out health and safety checks of carers' homes and cars when they are assessed these are updated regularly. The service provides carers with health and safety information in the foster carers' handbook. The nature of the fostering service provided by the agency means that the majority of children are placed with short notice or in an emergency. Despite this the agency makes generally effective arrangements to provide well matched foster placements for children who need them. The agency makes sure that foster carers receive good information about the child being placed with them though this information is often verbal initially. The agency works hard to make sure that full LAC documentation regarding children is acquired

from the placing authority and passed onto the carer but this often is received some time after the placement is made. Foster carers and children's social workers are very satisfied by the agency's matching arrangements. Foster carers trust the service to match carefully and say they are never pressurised to take a placement they are uncomfortable with. Foster placement agreement meetings do not always happen soon enough when placements are made and are not always individual to the young person concerned. For example one agreement meeting took place around two weeks after the young person was placed. Another agreement related to a group of siblings rather than there being an agreement for each young person. Foster placement agreements contain a section setting out the matching considerations that took place before the placement was made. This section is not always completed in enough detail to provide evidence of the careful consideration of the match. For example in one situation of a placement of a challenging young person with inexperienced carers the matching section identified only that the young person fell within the terms of the carers approval, safe care and sleeping arrangements. The agency is good at keeping fostered children safe. It carries out rigorous assessments and checks of new foster carers. The agency also supervises and manages foster carers well to ensure that they are caring for children properly. Children feel safe and well cared for in their placements and know how to make a complaint and who to speak to if they have a problem. Children told inspectors things about their carers like, 'They treat me like their own child' and 'I feel happy and safe where I live. My foster family care about me.' The agency supports carers to develop safe caring policies that are specific to the children being fostered. Safe caring policies are supported by safe placement risk assessments that consider the carer, their home and its location, travelling arrangements, emergency support and so on. Children's social workers are involved in and consulted about these documents. The manager has an effective system for recording and monitoring any complaints, incidents or allegations made about carers and the agency takes appropriate action to respond to these. Records of significant events are also maintained and monitored by a critical incidents panel of senior staff who consider any actions needed as a result of an incident. Carers receive training in child protection, behaviour management and bullying. However, arrangements to provide carers with training in managing challenging behaviour are not always prompt enough. For example, the agency identified that new and inexperienced carers needed this training within their assessment. This need was identified again following some difficulties experienced caring for a challenging young person. This training had not been provided nearly three months later however, although the carers had received individual support from agency staff. The agency operates a careful and robust recruitment procedure to make sure that applicants are qualified, experienced and suitable people to work with children. CRB checks on staff and foster carers are updated every three years. The fostering agency has an effective panel in operation. This panel is correctly constituted with members with suitable backgrounds. Panel gives careful consideration to the matters presented to it and makes clear and specific recommendations to the agency's decision maker. Minutes of meetings are detailed and comprehensive and provide clear records of the panel's discussion and recommendation made. In one instance panel was presented with erroneous verbal information regarding the receipt of a reference. The panel made a recommendation to the agency decision maker based, partially, on this information. Consequently, the recruitment of the carer concerned was not as robust as it could have been.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Most of SWIIS's foster carers and the children they foster are from white backgrounds. The demographic make up of the area in which the agency provides services is largely white. The

service provides foster carers with good information about promoting equality and diversity within the foster carer handbook. Issues surrounding this are covered in foster carers' approval training. The agency provides support and advice to foster carers looking after children from different ethnic backgrounds. The agency considers the diverse needs of each child at the point of matching and gives carers as much information as possible to help them meet children's needs. Children with disabilities receive very good support from the service and its foster carers. Good individual training is available for carers working with children with disabilities. For example, foster carers have undertaken training in autism. The agency's health adviser provides excellent support in this area. Foster carers are provided with any specialist equipment needed by children. The agency provides excellent support to fostered children with their education. The service employs education case workers who are qualified teachers in order to help children achieve. These staff are able to work with children in and out of school and liaise with educational and other professionals to ensure that children's education is promoted. In addition, direct work is undertaken with children in school or with their homework. One young person said, 'There's a teacher from SWIIS who comes and helps me with my subject.' Education case workers also monitor children's school attendance closely and provide support when children are not attending school. The agency assesses the ability of people to promote children's education as part of the assessment process to become foster carers. It also provides carers with ongoing training and support in this area. Children's educational arrangements and needs are considered as part of the matching process and effective work takes place to make sure children are helped to access the right school for their needs. For example, an integral part of the placement process for one young person was to make sure that a place at the right school was available. Children have Personal Education Plans (PEP) in place and the agency works with placing social workers and carers to ensure that these are up-to-date. Children's files contain particularly good and detailed information about their educational achievement and the support provided to them. These files show the close work undertaken with schools by the agency. The agency provides carers with information about the promotion of children's education in the foster carers' handbook. Educational equipment is provided for children in foster care where needed and additional educational help is sought where appropriate. Children are encouraged and supported to undertake activities in the community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency works with placing authorities to make children's contact arrangements clear to foster carers. The agency takes contact arrangements and plans into consideration when children are matched with suitable carers. For example, consideration of how contact with significant people could be maintained took place when one young person was placed some distance away from home. The agency's foster placement agreement forms contain detailed information about contact arrangements. Children's files contain clear information about any arrangements for contact and any legal basis for the arrangements. The agency makes the importance of positive contact with family and friends clear to carers and the agency supports carers to manage contact arrangements and to deal with any difficulties arising from them. Children receive good support to have contact with their families wherever this is appropriate. The agency provides placing social workers with written monthly updates of the child's progress and foster carers' recording contributes to these reports. Foster carers record children's reactions to contact and this information is used when developing and reviewing children's plans. The agency helps its foster carers to support children to have good networks with friends and within the wider community. The agency and its carers provide support for children to make and keep friends and to take

part in activities in the community. The agency consults with children about the care they receive and wider aspects agency's work. Foster carers listen to the views of their fostered children and children have a say about their day to day lives. For example one young person said, 'I have my say, we discuss things.' The agency takes notice of children's opinions about their care and their opinions are sought about matters concerning them. For example, when one young person expressed a wish to move from a foster home this was taken seriously and the reasons behind the request established. As a consequence the young person's concerns were dealt with and the child decided to remain with the carers. The agency and its carers help children to express their views about what is happening to them in their reviews. Children's opinions also form a key part of their foster carers' annual reviews. Children know how to complain and who to speak to if they have a problem. The agency provides children with a young person's guide telling them about being fostered. The agency records children's views as they expressed informally or in group settings. Children's views about their education are sought and work is done with children to find out what they want out of life. Activities take place for children and a children's newsletter is produced.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The fostering agency has a Statement of Purpose in place. Work is taking place to make sure that this is up-to-date. The agency gives children a young person's guide to the agency and produces other accessible information for children. The staff team includes fostering social workers, a health adviser and education case workers and support workers. It is supported by sufficient administrative support. The agency has effective staff training, supervision and appraisal arrangements. The team is effectively managed and the agency has very good working arrangements with local authorities that place children with them. Children's social workers have a high regard for the work of the agency. For example one said, 'It's an excellent service, very child centred with a very committed staff team.' The fostering team communicates effectively with foster carers and placing social workers. These good working relationships help promote good outcomes for children. The agency is careful and thorough in the way it assesses foster carers. The assessment process includes checks on the applicant's suitability and a very thorough consideration and evaluation of their attitudes, personalities and skills to foster. Assessments include input from a second social worker to increase their objectivity. They are further strengthened by involvement of one of the agency's education case workers who help assess the applicants' capacity to promote children's educational achievement. Applicants are visited and interviewed frequently as part of their preparation process and records of visits to referees are signed by the referee to confirm their accuracy. Foster carers are well supported throughout the assessment process. The agency provides very good support and management to its carers. Foster carers are very satisfied with the help provided to them and their fostered children. For example, one carer said, 'The ongoing support from SWIIS has been fantastic.' Another said simply, 'The service we receive is wonderful.' Out of hours support is effective and telephone advice and support is provided to carers as well as regular visits by their supervising social worker. Foster carer support groups take place very regularly and foster carers use these sessions to invite speakers and discuss important issues. Effective arrangements for undertaking foster carers' annual reviews are in place. Reviews take place annually and include, wherever possible, the views of the young person in placement as well as his or her

social worker, the foster carer and the supervising social worker. Reviews monitor the appropriateness of the foster carer's terms of approval and ensure that any updates to the original assessment or changes in terms of approval take place. They also consider the foster carer's continued suitability to foster and any additional training or support needed. Reviews are presented to the agency's fostering panel for consideration before being agreed by the decision maker. Foster carers are supervised formally on a monthly basis as well as receiving ongoing informal supervision and support. Topics covered in supervision include placement issues, personal and professional matters and development as well as a review of the young persons' risk assessment and care. Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place appropriately. The service provides foster carers with a linked programme of training. This includes initial training during an applicant's assessment, two days of induction training and five days foundation training. Ongoing training is provided based on carers' wishes or needs identified by the service. For example recent training has included: education; child protection; behaviour management; attachment; cultural awareness; and autism. The agency provides NVQ level 3 training in childcare for its foster carers and is working to bring its training process in line with the Children's Workforce Development Council's National Occupational Standards for foster carers. Training is discussed and encouraged in supervision and foster carers' review meetings. The agency works well with children's placing authorities to ensure that it has full and up-to-date information regarding the children placed. Children's files contain all the necessary documentation required by the LAC system. Files show that the agency works hard to ensure that placing authorities supply full and up-to-date information about children. Children's records held by the fostering agency help support the care provided. Files are maintained in good order and contain detailed information about events and the work being done with a young person. Detailed monthly summaries are sent to local authorities to help in their care planning and reviewing process. The agency supplies good information for children's reviews. The agency has effective administrative and recording systems in place. These ensure that records of foster carers, children, significant events and miscellaneous matters are well maintained and monitored.

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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Recommendations

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

- ensure that a foster placement agreement is completed for each child placed with foster carers at the time that the placement is made and that placement agreement records contain detailed information about the matching elements considered when the placement was planned (NMS 8.4)

- ensure that all carers receive training in managing children's behaviour, particularly where this training has been identified as necessary within carers' assessments or as a result of situations that have arisen (NMS 9.2)
- ensure that the fostering panel is supplied with full and accurate written information on which to base its recommendations and that matters are only considered by panel when full written information is available (NMS 30.1).

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.