

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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Swiis Foster Care, Severn House, Mandale Park, Belmont Industrial Estate, Durham
DH1 1TH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A large private provider operates this agency. It provides foster care placements used by several placing authorities. A range of placements are provided, including short-term, long-term and respite. The agency is responsible for the recruitment, training and support of foster carers.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 113 children and young people with 75 approved foster carers.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 May 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 7 December 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:

- Overall, children and young people are making good progress.
- Most children and young people live in stable homes with foster carers who care about them and treat them like family.
- Careful matching ensures that children and young people's needs are well met. Meaningful consideration is given to meeting the individual cultural and religious needs of children and young people.
- Children and young people are safer. Foster carers understand how to protect them, and report concerns to the agency and other professionals, working together to minimise risk.
- Children and young people make good educational progress. They receive support to aspire and achieve.
- Children and young people's health and overall well-being are highly prioritised and monitored.
- Children and young people enjoy a range of fun and exciting activities that provide new experiences and enrichment to their lives.
- Children and young people have excellent opportunities to have their say about their plans and the development of the agency.
- Leaders and managers use monitoring tools effectively, which enables them to monitor children and young people's outcomes and continue to improve their lives.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- While one potentially serious incident was addressed by the agency, it was not notified to Ofsted.
- Not all the records are up to date, clear and accurate.

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
If any of the events listed in paragraph (1) of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))	29/06/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that the registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify, or which are raised with them. (National Minimum Standard 25.8) In particular, make sure that all the records are up to date, clear and accurate.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The quality of children and young people's care and support in foster placements is of a high standard overall. Most young people excel in all aspects of their lives because they feel settled in their foster homes. They are well integrated into family life. A young person told his social worker that his foster carers 'treat me like family'.

Good matching of children and young people with foster carers who have the right level of experience, skills and resilience promotes placement stability. Foster carers promote the needs of children and young people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to themselves. The agency and foster carers show good insight into the impact of racism on children and young people's emotional well-being. Children and young people who speak English as an additional language are supported to communicate their views through interpreters and information available in their first language. Foster carers are learning to cook culturally appropriate meals. Inclusion is promoted, and this enables children and young people to feel proud of their heritage.

Genuinely caring, trusting and loving relationships are formed between children and young people and their foster carers. Positively, young people express a keen wish to remain with their foster carers under the 'Staying Put' arrangements. Any threats to placement stability are captured very quickly and robustly by the agency, and additional support is given to foster carers so that placements are given every opportunity to succeed. Placement breakdowns are sensitively handled.

Children and young people are making very good progress in their education overall. All children and young people are in full-time education, with an average attendance of 98% and 84% achieving the expected levels of attainment. No children and young people are excluded from their educational provision. This is an excellent achievement for children and young people, some of whom have not been in education for several years. They are improving their life chances and realising their potential. Additional support from the agency education adviser strengthens and helps children and young people to overcome barriers to their learning.

Children and young people's physical, emotional and psychological health outcomes improve as a direct result of the good, nurturing care in their foster homes. Foster carers ensure that children and young people promptly access primary and specialist health services. The dedication, care and concern shown by foster carers and the agency towards children and young people with health issues, including life-threatening health needs, are exceptionally good. Foster carers and professionals speak highly about the excellent advice and support from the agency health adviser. This includes carrying out bespoke pieces of work with young people on specific issues, such as identity and sexuality, self-esteem, healthy living, and drug and sexual health awareness. A foster carer said, '[Name of health adviser] is on the ball and she took the lead, which has been fab.'

Children and young people experience new, fun and exciting hobbies and interests, including horse riding, sports, playing music with celebrities and enjoying social events. For some young people, travelling has opened their minds to different cultures and historical places, thus widening their own ambitions and enriching their

lives. Foster carers are sensitive to children and young people who may have missed significant milestones, such as birthdays, by making sure they are acknowledged and celebrated. This makes children and young people feel special.

Children and young people's level of participation and consultation at different events is an excellent example of how their views influence service developments. This promotes respect and trust. The children and young people have contributed to the development of a scheme to assist new children and young people to settle into their placement. They will be given 'Swiss care bears', knitted and donated by a foster carer. Each bear will be accompanied by an 'All about me' card written by children and young people. The intention is to help other children and young people moving into foster placements develop a sense of belonging. It encourages them to write key things about themselves and ask questions that they initially don't feel confident about asking.

Children and young people are actively supported to develop independence skills, irrespective of their age and development. Older young people are finding part-time employment and learning skills that will benefit them as they mature into adulthood.

Where possible, children and young people maintain family contact, which reinforces their family roots.

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

Children and young people are protected from harm associated with all forms of abuse. This is due to the robust safeguarding practices of the agency and foster carers, and contributes to keeping children and young people safe. Foster carers, the agency and specialist professionals work together to discuss with children and young people their vulnerabilities and the risks they may face.

Young people are able to talk to their foster carers and trusted adults about any concerns or worries they may have, due to the positive mutual relationships. Foster carer training in a range of relevant topics, such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, radicalisation and extremism, and substance misuse, provides a good insight into current issues. Some foster carers have been proactive in sourcing specific training alongside specialist support to young people, helping them understand the risks associated with some of the young people's risky behaviours. Robust risk management of young people's vulnerabilities, clear structure and boundaries, safe caring practices and consistent support have significantly reduced the risks to young people as they settle into life with the foster family. There is no current risk of child sexual exploitation or extremism, although the possibility of such re-emerging risks is not ignored.

When young people have gone missing from home, foster carers take appropriate action to secure their welfare. This is achieved through effective coordination between the agency, foster carers, police and local authority. The agency is improving at progressing return home interviews with local authorities. This ensures that children and young people who go missing are offered an opportunity to discuss their reasons for leaving their foster homes.

Serious incidents are managed well by the agency. However, while one potentially serious incident several months ago was managed, it was not notified to Ofsted. This does not enable Ofsted to monitor the action taken. Remedial action by the

manager has identified lessons and no further incidents of this nature have happened since.

The support to foster carers who have been the subject of allegations has helped them to recover, learn lessons and, in some cases, continue to successfully care for young people who have made the allegation against them. Deregistration of unsuitable foster carers prevents them from affecting children and young people's lives and helps the agency to improve practice.

Behaviour management training supports foster carers to de-escalate children and young people's challenging behaviours, helping them to self-regulate. Foster carers rarely use physical intervention, but when it does happen, the record of the practice is scrutinised by the manager to ensure that it is safe and proportionate. Action is taken when it is not. However, the lack of clarity in some records of physical intervention and behaviour management techniques is open to interpretation and possible allegations.

Monthly visits by the agency supervising social workers provide invaluable support to foster carers. Foster carers confirm that unannounced visits take place, which provides an additional safeguard. The agency's collaborative working practices with placing authorities and safeguarding professionals help to keep children and young people safe by escalating their concerns as appropriate.

Staff recruitment practices are safe and appropriately scrutinised to ensure that adults who may pose a risk to children and young people do not have access to them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The fostering agency has undergone some significant changes over the last two years.

Overall, the leadership and management team promotes consistently high standards of care and has high aspirations for children and young people, which is helping children and young people reach their potential. A new manager was appointed in January 2017. Her application to register with Ofsted is being processed. The manager is a qualified social worker with the right experience and professionalism to manage the agency. The manager's conscientious approach is an asset to the agency because she expects high standards and has a clear child-focus. She provides excellent leadership and direction to the team, which, with senior management support, has been the driving force behind the major restructure of the agency by merging two offices into one.

Over the last 12 months, the manager has identified and addressed some significant failures. These related to poor service delivery, including foster carer and staff performance concerns that were impacting on the ability of the service to deliver good outcomes. Consequently, foster carers have been deregistered due to safeguarding and professional conduct concerns, and supervising social workers have either resigned or have been disciplined and/or dismissed. The appointment of a deputy manager and new supervising social work staff means that, together with the existing staff, there is now a skilled and competent workforce.

The manager is ethical, efficient and respected by her peers as a 'safe pair of hands'. Her regular evaluation of the quality of service helps her to monitor and

quickly rectify weakness that she identifies or that is brought to her attention. Improved systems provide the manager with the information to help her to monitor the service and have oversight of any patterns, trends and themes. She is implementing the development of action plans, which makes for a robust, self-evaluative fostering agency that takes its role to improve children and young people's outcomes seriously.

An effective and co-coordinative approach to addressing serious concerns, complaints and significant incidents is achieved by the manager. This is performed in conjunction with other key professionals, which promotes transparent practice.

The panel chair and panel members are robust and effective in making sound recommendations to the agency decision-maker, who in turn provides credible agency representation. Exceptionally good panel minutes provide a coherent account of panel proceedings. Panel members' training and appraisal have impacted positively on their individual learning and development in their role.

The assessment of foster carers is thorough and strong. Not all foster carers have felt fully prepared to care for children and young people who present with high-risk behaviours. Similarly, not all foster carers have always felt prepared to care for children and young people when provided with limited information from placing authority social workers. However, they have felt well supported by the agency, which actively chases missing information. Annual reviews provide a reflective account of foster carers' continued suitability to foster.

Foster carers report excellent quality of support from the agency and speak highly about the team and their treatment. They value the out-of-hours support and training and development opportunities.

The agency has met the requirement and recommendations raised at the previous inspection, showing capacity to improve.

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: SC036081

Registered provider: SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Registered provider address: Connaught House, 80–81 Wimpole Street, London W1G 9RE

Responsible individual: Keith Stopher

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspector

Jacqueline Malcolm, social care inspector



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