

Fairways Care UK Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Lynda Mosling
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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

Fairways Care (UK) Ltd Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency based in Southampton. It is part of the Fairways (UK) Ltd group that also provides residential placements. The fostering service is registered to provide placements for young people up to the age of eighteen years. The young people are referred by local authorities across the southern counties. There are currently twenty one carers registered with the agency but recruitment is on-going.

Summary

This is an announced inspection and assesses the key National Minimum Standards for fostering services. The overall outcomes for young people fostered through the service are good. Two of the outcome areas, enjoying and achieving, and organisation, are judged as outstanding. The service are very child centred and monitor their performance on a regular basis. There are good systems for matching young people and foster carers and young people feel safe and well cared for. Carers receive excellent support and are valued by the service. The service is well managed and employs committed, enthusiastic staff who understand the needs of fostered young people.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection of this service two actions were made, both relating to the fostering panel. These were to clarify the roles of the panel members, and clarify the way decisions are taken following recommendations by the panel. These have been addressed and the panel minutes now provide an accurate record of panel members and the decisions made. Other improvements include: clearer reporting in the young people's files; good systems to audit foster care training; more education options following the registration of a school provided by the service; monthly visits to young people in placement. The improvements have provided young people with more opportunities for consultation and have increased their education achievements. They have also provided clear, consistent systems to evidence the work undertaken by the agency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are assessed prior to placement and inform the process of matching carers and young people. Good assessments, including specialist information, ensure carers are aware of how to best meet the needs of the young people placed with them. Young people are encouraged to live healthy lives and are informed of any likely risks resulting from their choices. Clear records of appointments with doctors, opticians and dentists demonstrate that carers provide good support to young people to look after their health needs. Health needs are regularly reviewed and up-dated. The service provides appropriate training to carers to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the young person. Therapy is available to young people, carers and staff to ensure a shared understanding of young people's emotional needs. This results in good management of challenging behaviour across the service.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The manager has the appropriate qualifications and experience to carry on the service. The manager provides good leadership and is skilled at promoting enthusiasm and confidence in the staff group. Foster homes are providing good care in a nurturing environment. Young people said they felt safe and well cared for. All young people benefit from single rooms that are individually decorated to take account of their wishes. Risk assessments and clear safe care plans for each young person ensure safety is a priority. The foster carer assessments are thorough and take into account any potential hazards such as family pets, proximity to the road and transport issues. Carers are aware of their responsibility to keep young people safe whilst allowing them to take considered risks as part of becoming independent. The process of matching young people with carers is good with a process to record the matching considerations. This highlights any gaps in matching, such as closeness to family and school, shared interests, religion and culture, and identifies how these gaps will be managed. Sometimes links with other carers will be made to provide additional support. The service only accept a referral if they have an appropriate available carer to ensure the best experience for the young person. Carers sign a foster care agreement and a placement agreement to ensure they are aware of their role and the expectations of the organisation. Carers are providing good sensitive care to the young people placed. Child protection training is part of the carer's induction and they are aware of the child protection procedures. There are clear guidelines about permitted sanctions and carers have been trained in restraint techniques as part of the behaviour management process. Carers feel well supported by the staff when they are in challenging situations. Young people said they are not being bullied in their placements but some had experienced it outside of the home. Young people feel confident that their carers and the supervising social workers take up such issues on their behalf. Carers discuss any incidents of restraint with their supervising social workers who ensure the policy and procedures are correctly followed to provide safe care to the young person. There are good, safe recruitment processes that put the safety of young people first. The checks taken up include references from all previous employers as well as the usual criminal record bureau, probation and health checks. The staff have appropriate qualifications for their roles and are encouraged to undertake post qualifying child care training. There is evidence that inappropriate staff have been correctly dealt with. The fostering panel is working effectively. It is chaired by an independent person and has a good mix of skills and experiences represented, including an adult who was previously a fostered child. The assessment information presented to the panel is thorough and includes information about competences and experience with young people. Applicants are invited to attend and are dealt with sensitively by the panel members. There is good recording of all recommendations and decisions made.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The organisation makes excellent attempts to understand individual needs and provide care to meet these. They celebrate differences and encourage carers, staff and young people to value the individual. Recruitment strategies are in place to ensure as wide a range of carers as possible, and all training provided aims to value diversity. There is a clear belief that all young people can reach their potential with help and support. The service has set up a youth club for young people with disabilities to increase opportunities to socialise. This has also encouraged self-advocacy within this group. There is acceptance that everyone has their own valid targets and that the service should help individuals meet these. Young people are treated with respect

and tolerance. They feel they have grown through their experience of fostering and have become more positive about themselves. Social workers have a very thorough knowledge of the carers and their skills and use this when matching placements. This has enabled many placements to become long-term, providing stability to the young people. Carers challenge any unfair treatment of the young people in their care and advocate strongly on their behalf. Education has a very high priority within the service. The service also provide a school registered to take young people with challenging behaviour and really understand the place schooling and education has within the young person's overall care. The school offers placements on a full time basis and can provide the education for some fostered young people. The aim is always to help the young person to return to main stream education and there have been a number of successes where the young person has gone into local schools and colleges. Foster carers are actively involved in choosing appropriate schools and supporting the schools with any challenging behaviour. Carers have daily contact with schools and often provide transport to enable young people to remain at their usual school to ensure consistency. Foster carers receive training in how to help young people with their education and accept their responsibility to encourage attendance, homework and good communication with schools.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Contact with family and friends is a clear expectation across the service and foster carers demonstrate good understanding of the young people's need to retain contact. Some complicated contact arrangements are organised and supported by the carers to ensure young people have safe contact. There is evidence of the service helping young people re-engage with parents who have not been in contact for a long time. Young people feel confident that their families are valued by the carers. This helps raise their self-esteem. Young people are consulted by their carers on a day to day basis. They feel listened to and know who to talk to if they disagree with any actions or plans. They have regular one to one sessions with the supervising social workers in addition to contact with the placing social worker. This provides good opportunities to raise any issues of concern. The service provides young people with opportunities to get together to discuss their experiences of being fostered. This has enabled young people to produce a compact disc of poems and songs describing their time in care which they distribute to social workers, staff and carers. Young people attend all reviews of the placement and are involved in the reviews of foster carers. Young people are sometimes in disagreement with the plans the placing agency make for them, particularly if it results in the ending of a successful placement. Carers and staff advocate for young people at such times but are hampered by not being seen as independent.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose provides a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the service. It outlines the service on offer, the referral process and how to contact the service. In addition there is a pack for prospective foster carers that clearly states the expectations of foster carers and the process of assessment. The service has a website that describes all of its services and how they fit together. Young people, their carers, parents and placing social workers are usually

seen by the manager prior to the start of a placement to ensure everyone agrees with the aims of the placement. This promotes consistency and a good team ethos. All staff have a job description and a clear idea of their role. The organisation is excellent at holding on to staff by providing good support, excellent training opportunities and making the best use of everyone's skills. Staff are given responsibilities that enable them to continue to grow and learn. There are often internal promotions and staff talk of feeling like 'part of a family'. Supervision is provided regularly and there is honest feedback that ensures any performance issues are picked up and dealt with. The staff present as confident, committed and enthusiastic about the organisation and the young people. The manager of the organisation, the provider and the staff share an office in the head office so there is constant sharing of ideas and excellent problem solving systems. Every-one feels valuable and part of the team. The administration back up is very good and there is an accountant on site to help keep the budget under control. Carers say there is always someone available on the telephone and that they are dealt with promptly and warmly. The organisation takes student social workers and some apply for jobs with the agency when vacancies arise. They also have a very good record of providing and supporting training to allow social work staff to gain appropriate qualifications. The staff are committed to the organisation and share their vision. This results in enthusiastic and energised staff. 'You have to be passionate about young people to work here'. Staff undertake a range of work supporting young people and carers, attending meetings, setting up holiday schemes and support groups. Everyone is busy but there are sufficient staff to provide the agreed service. Recruitment of carers is excellent. The organisation are very clear what they want from carers and produce information to prospective carers that spells out the expectations. They then go through an induction process, an assessment and are expected to develop a portfolio of their competences, their profile and what they have to offer which is shared with the panel at the approval stage and provides information that can be shared later with placing social workers and young people. Where there are gaps in experience the prospective carers are offered the chance to work in the school or the organisation's registered children's home to get the necessary experience. Where this happens carers say it is 'a real eye opener'. The experiences appear to have strengthened the carer's confidence and ability to manage some of the most challenging behaviour. There is evidence of many of the placements becoming long-term. This demonstrates good recruitment and matching processes and provides much needed stability to the young people placed. Support to carers is an area the organisation excel in. The carers spoke of 'brilliant' support. This included: monthly supervision; availability of staff; out of hours support; contact with managers; practical support such as taking the young person out for the day; assistance at medical appointments and at difficult contact sessions. Respite care, provision of holidays and feeling a crucial part of the team are also valued by carers. The service recognises that foster care involves the whole family and send birthday cards, flowers and gifts to family members. Training for foster carers has become more closely monitored with each carer having a training register showing what certificates they have. This enables the supervising social workers to encourage the take up of training and provide further training that meets specific needs. Carers can find courses they want locally, or from the internet, and the organisation will provide financial and practical help for them to attend. The supervising social workers are clear about their role and have contracts with placing social workers that spell out their responsibilities. The young people's files hold all the information required to provide good care and to evidence reviews and planning. The information is thorough, clear and up-to-date. There is a consistency across the files and the information is very easy to access and understand. There are copies of reviews, safe caring strategies, risk assessments, one to one sessions with young people, contracts with the placing authorities and copies of all correspondence. Referral forms and

matching forms are also included on the files. This gives very clear evidence as to why a particular placement was chosen and how young people's needs are being met. The agency retrieves information from placing agencies to ensure all necessary information is passed to the carers. They are also good at ensuring the young people are aware of the information held about them and know that they can challenge this. All the necessary records are maintained and are clear and up-to-date. Reviews of files are undertaken regularly and the service continually look at ways to make recording simpler and easier to read. They are aware of the legal requirements of record keeping and have become much more efficient at evidencing their work. This has benefits for the commissioning processes as well as for regulators.

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):

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.