

Fairways Care UK

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Date of last inspection	22/09/2010

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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 agency is registered to provide a range of placements for young people up to the age of 18 years including short and long-term foster care. The agency also provides parent and child placements. Children and young people in placement are referred by local authorities across the southern counties. There are currently 48 foster places available with 77 children and young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This independent fostering agency has had major changes to staffing since the last inspection, including the Registered Manager. In addition, the agency has grown significantly. Although overall, the agency demonstrates a high standard of practice, there are some monitoring weaknesses and an unsatisfactory Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide. These shortfalls have no impact on safeguarding or promoting children's welfare, and the agency is well-placed to promptly and thoroughly put them right.

This agency has a larger number of filled foster care places than the national average. This suggests prompt action on vacancies, and may also suggest that

placements are generally stable. Until recently this was supported by agency data demonstrating lower rates of placement disruption than average. However, the rate of disruptions has now increased to be in line with the national average. Local authority commissioners still consider that placement stability is one of this agency's strengths especially given the high needs of young people placed with them.

There are some notable areas of strong practice, which mean that usually this agency makes and maintains successful and stable foster placements. For example, the effective fostering panel is well chaired and offers good scrutiny of foster care applicants. Matching young people with the right foster carers is also completed very effectively. Overall, the very good level of professional support offered to fostering families from supervising social workers, in-house therapeutic services, and by an imaginative training programme is a key strength of this agency.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
3 (2011)	ensure that the statement of purpose and the children's guide are appropriately updated, and that copies are sent to the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 3 (2) and (4) and 4 (a))	30/06/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This specifically refers to systematic tracking of young people's outcomes from their starting points (NMS 25.1)
- ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends; and take immediate action to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2)
- ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. This specifically relates to the panel chair and panel members.

(NMS 24.6)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is highly effective at matching young people with an appropriate carer, and this together with useful pre-placement information helps young people feel comfortable in their new placement. The process of matching is carefully done, and results in some highly effective arrangements reflecting both ethnicity and religion and the need for siblings to be in regular contact. Young people present as well-cared for, and many make strong attachments with their foster carers. They say, 'she's like my Mum'. The agency actively promotes placement stability, and some young people are very relieved and happy that their placement is now to be a long-term one.

Young people benefit from the agency's significant resource commitment to enabling regular contact. On occasion, agency staff have successfully advocated for young people to have more frequent contact and this has been of clear benefit to young people's well-being. Young people are encouraged to follow their interests, and some find new skills they can excel in. Other young people relish the freedom to have permission, 'to express themselves' in their foster placement and this helps them feel more positively about themselves. Young people are generally encouraged by their carers to be involved in daily decisions as appropriate, and enjoy choosing their clothes, their food and what they will do in their leisure time. Some young people are able to reflect on their past behaviour, and celebrate that being in foster care means their actions are no longer hurting themselves or others.

Some young people receive helpful and positive play therapy from in-house services, which assist them in reframing the negative impact of their past. Other young people need routine medical attention for their physical needs, and the agency appropriately supports fostering families so they can provide this well. Some young people have made significant improvements in their physical health, particularly in terms of their dental health and healthier height and weight. Other young people have made huge strides in their education attendance and achievement. Some are now attending very regularly, and others are achieving results that they did not know were possible and feel rightly proud.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Foster care recruitment and initial training is effectively undertaken by a small, specialist team who have previously worked as SSW's. This means they have a well-informed view about the skills needed from possible applicants, and can therefore appropriately reject unsuitable candidates at an early stage. The whole recruitment process is child-focused, and foster carers themselves acknowledge the powerful impact of hearing directly from young people in placement on their initial training

weekend. Foster care assessments are usually well-completed in a timely manner, and the panel is appropriately vigilant about the quality of assessments presented to them. The panel meeting is well chaired by a very experienced practitioner who presides over an established panel. Panel minutes are sound, contain appropriate detail and outstanding items are effectively followed up. Although the panel chair has satisfactory links to the agency this does not include a routine appraisal, and this shortfall applies to panel members as well. This limits agency monitoring of the Panel's performance. The agency took action during the inspection to remedy this shortfall.

A major strength of this agency is the professional support options open to foster carers. Supervising social workers (SSW's) carry a strictly limited caseload of fostering families that enables a very good level of support to them. Foster carers say, 'a high level of support is always there'. Other foster carers particularly praise out of hours services saying, 'it feels okay to ring, and they give you really good support which they follow up'. This high level of professional support also includes some time with birth children, and an agency expectation of regular individual sessions with young people in placement. Local authority colleagues note that the agency has, 'a really good knowledge of young people'. Young people value the direct support they usually receive saying, 'the support on offer is outstanding'. Other young people say, 'they are the best, they know what they are doing'. However, on occasion young people are not routinely visited as often as expected, and management monitoring does not currently pick up this shortfall.

Fostering families also strongly benefit from the time limited in-house therapeutic services which foster carers can access directly. Many do so repeatedly for a range of issues covering both their own emotional adjustment, or for guidance in relation to issues about young people in placement. Foster carers are clear that they greatly value this bespoke service. The SSW support and in house therapeutic services effectively combine to offer a high level of professional support to foster care households that helps everyone in a fostering family cope better with the inevitable demands.

Young people form strong bonds with their carers, and take full part in family life. For example, some reported and showed photos of their recent family holiday, some birth children have involved their wheelchair using foster-sibling in a football game, and a fostered young person volunteers to cook the tea for a younger member of the household. The agency is proactive in assisting young people's contact with their birth families. This can be complex for example, regularly interpreting the responses of uncommunicative young people to family members by telephone, or ensuring large sibling group contact. However, the agency view is that this time is well-spent: 'If you build an accepting relationship with their families, you get a better relationship with the young person'. This positive approach helps young people sustain important relationships, which may be crucial to them in the future.

Local authority colleagues see this agency as taking the most challenging young people, and the training provided equips foster carers very well to meet these complex needs. Other than the necessary core skills, there is an imaginative selection

of courses around nurturing and attachment in particular, which are very popular with carers and help them to reframe young people's behaviour. Generally, carers work well with local authority colleagues and together with their support worker attend and contribute to all essential meetings. Foster carers are clear around delegated authority and specific arrangements are effectively dealt with at the start of the placement. Young people benefit from the cohesive team around them.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Young people are confident in stating both that they feel safe, and that they have people they would talk to if they are worried about anything. They cite both their foster carers and their supervising social workers as people they trust, and demonstrate on visits to the agency office how relaxed they feel with all staff.

Young people who engage in behaviour that puts them at risk by, for example, going missing, are well supported in developing alternative strategies to help them stay safe. Internal processes are explicit in their expectations of carers to actively intervene to help keep young people safe, and these are backed up by regularly reviewed risk assessments and adherence to appropriately individualised protocols. There are effective relationships between the agency, police and placing authorities who say in relation to missing behaviour that they have, 'no concerns, carers have a very good sense of they need to do'.

Foster carers receive effective training on the possible impact of past abuse for example, how to deliver safe care. This gives foster carers useful skills such as how to cuddle a child safely. Foster carers are confident about dealing with disclosures, and understand what action they need to take. Currently, there is no effective monitoring system to ensure that annual unannounced visits take place. This means that the agency was unaware that some had been missed. However, this has not had an adverse effect on young people's welfare, as during this time period young people have been seen by their supervising social workers separately from their foster carers.

This agency has an open culture, which further protects young people from harm. For example, SSW's have regular reflective sessions both individually and as a group. This encourages them to share feelings and dilemmas and creates a climate of no secrets. Recruitment practice is thorough and involves validated checks and a safeguarding scenario at interview. Probation periods are effectively monitored, and there is a clear, positive, whistleblowing procedure.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement**.

Leaders and managers have strong working relationships with placing authorities who say, 'we can talk to them about anything and they listen'. Placing authorities

think highly of this agency, and value the services it offers to young people. Any misunderstandings are promptly ironed out. These effective relationships assist young people to receive a well-integrated care experience.

Placement plans are structured around outcomes based on care plans. For example, 'promote independence', 'ensure school attendance'. These are usually discussed in supervision. However, these outcomes are insufficiently broken down into achievable goals, and there is no systematic monitoring, tracking and reviewing. This makes it difficult for staff to identify whether further action should be taken to ensure that young people make appropriate progress.

There are also additional monitoring weaknesses, most notably ineffective use of systems to ensure compliance with agency policies. This means that managers are not able to risk assess gaps in expected processes. In addition, young people and foster carers are insufficiently involved in the development of the service leading to some carers feeling their views are not as valued as they were. This also means that managers lack an important perspective when reviewing the service as a whole. Agency scrutiny of Panel functioning is also insufficient.

To their credit the agency has identified these gaps and has plans to address them all. However, a recommendation has been made on all four areas to ensure that the relevant national minimum standards are met.

The Statement of Purpose and the children's guide have not been submitted to Ofsted as required. In addition, although broadly compliant with the regulations there are errors in both that require attention. The agency acknowledged these shortfalls and immediately started to put them right. A statutory requirement has been made, but there is no adverse impact on the care and well-being of children and young people.

There is a well-thought through plan for the recruitment of high quality foster carers, and generally the agency maintains an appropriate balance with their foster carers of support and monitoring. The agency as a whole is appropriately staffed, resourced and financially viable. It is part of a local, wider social care company and this offers additional benefits in terms of thorough care such as supported lodgings, and residential care staff expertise, and training. This helps promote the welfare of young people.

Supervising social work staff have both management and reflective supervision. They value this combination believing it enables them to be more effective with carers and young people. They receive appropriate training, and can access specialist external courses if required. Their appraisals do not yet reflect the views of young people or foster carers.

Notifiable events are appropriately reported to all relevant agencies including Ofsted. This helps support effective external monitoring of the actions of the agency.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.