

Quality Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Pat Stanton
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	305 High Road BENFLEET Essex SS7 5HA
Telephone number	01268 795597
Email	admin@qualityfostercare.com
Registered person	Quality Foster Care Limited
Registered manager	Jennifer Kim Paterson
Responsible individual	Keeley Nash
Date of last inspection	16 October 2006

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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

Quality Foster Care is an independent fostering agency in Benfleet, Essex situated in the main high street close to local transport, shops and amenities. The agency is based in a two-story building and comprises of a shop, kitchen diner, training room/kitchenette, two offices, contact room, training area and a bathroom/toilet. There is parking at the rear of the premises for staff and a large public car park. The premises is decorated and furnished to a good standard with facilities in the agency for children to play.

Summary

The purpose of the visit was to complete a reduced inspection between the 6th and 10th August 2007 in line with Ofsted requirements for all fostering services before April 2008. This inspection was completed within ten months of the agency's last full inspection therefore only two children and three carers were spoken with plus three members of staff. A variety of records were inspected, along with two young people's and carers case files. There was also a tour of the premises. Quality Foster Care provides a highly individualised level of support and care to children and young people. The agency is focused on meeting the needs of individual children and ensuring their wellbeing whilst promoting the needs of the community as a whole. The agency presents as a well managed environment and recruits only suitable foster carers who can meet the needs of children.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The Registered Manager has completed National Vocational Qualification Level 4 in Child Care Management and employed an additional social worker to help progress the service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster carers with information and training to help each foster child receive health care which meets their needs for physical, emotional and social development. Carers offer appropriate information according to the child's age to help them understand the importance of keeping healthy, including advice regarding diet, alcohol and substance abuse. Evidence was seen of a carers supporting children with smoking cessation programmes. Carers attend regular first aid training and have assessments on the home regarding health and safety issues. One home visited had three smoke alarms and a suitable first aid kit. Carers confirmed training at the agency is excellent. The Registered Manager is looking at the new guidelines being introduced regarding new training standards for foster carers in line with "Every Child Matters." Files evidenced foster children receive a good level of therapeutic support including counselling funded as part of the placement from the local authority. Young people receive counselling assessments to help measure their risk in the community and files confirmed young people have good access to therapists. Good records are maintained to show that young people access medical appointments and specialist health services where needed. Foster children are registered with a GP and supported when attending medical appointments by carers.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service protects young people from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation. Staff and foster carers are clear about their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding young people's welfare. File evidenced the agency's concern for one foster child in placement, following the placing local authority's sudden decision to allow unsupervised access to the child. Case files demonstrated the Registered Manager's concerns regarding the placing authority's decision. The service is very child-focused and ensures the needs of foster children are paramount. One carer confirmed the Registered Manager and the agency have knowledge of all the foster children and are very child-focused. Minutes from three fostering panels were examined and confirmed the service has clear procedures which are implemented in practice. Panel members consist of the appropriate number of independent panel members including a previous foster child and foster carer. Minutes evidenced questioning and assessments are comprehensive and one staff member stated how thorough the panel are regarding proposed written assessments. One carer confirmed the fostering panel were very professional. Records show that fire drills are consistently held and checks of fire safety equipment happen as required. The agency is secure and does not permit visitors without a Criminal Records Bureau check to have unsupervised access to foster children. The record of complaints evidenced there has been no complaints made since the previous inspection; children have previously confirmed that they know how to complain within the agency. The Registered Manager reviews all F Forms from prospective foster carers to ensure checks are completed on carers in respect of health and safety, pet ownership, identification, appropriate references and training prior to panel. The agency ensures foster carers are aware of keeping foster children safe including maintaining strict boundaries, diary keeping and the use of appropriate sanctions to encourage social acceptable behaviour. Young people are settled in their placements and present few behavioural difficulties. When a problem does arise, the agency notifies professionals and records details appropriately. There was no evidence of children being bullied during inspection. Incident and accidents examined indicated a relatively settled agency. The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service. The Registered Manager and the Registered Provider are suitable to run the business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Matching is carefully considered and each child is carefully matched with carers who are capable of meeting their needs. A recent visit from Pan London suggested the agency complete an aid memoir to assist in this process. Foster children evidenced they felt part of the family and trusted their foster carers. Comments included "I do not have any upset, if I do I speak to my foster carer, I think they pay enough attention to me, I would like to continue living here". Foster Carers encourage foster children to save £10 a week in their own named savings account.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency ensures that children and young people receive the specialist services they require to help support them including disability aids and language skills. One carer confirmed how much support she had accessed for her young foster child through various professionals. One agency staff member confirmed how she enjoyed the wide variety of her role including delivering additional English lessons to one foster child. The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting young people's educational needs and ensures foster carers are supported to help

young people achieve full potential. Files confirmed young people feel they are helped by carers when they have problems and one file from a school teacher confirmed the foster carer had shown commitment helping the foster child with weekly homework, shared successes, attending parent interviews, class assembly and year group activities. Foster children made a range of favourable comments regarding the activities and hobbies that they pursue and it is evident that the specific interests of individual children are taken into account by foster carers although one child wished the agency arranged more days out. Respite care for foster carers is arranged within the agency by other carers. One carer confirmed she never feels pressurised by the agency to accept respite care.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service ensures that each foster child is encouraged to maintain contact and develop family contact and friendships, as set out by the foster placement agreement. Children's placements are subject to regular review, as evidenced on both files inspected, although there is often a considerable delay in receiving vital information from the placing authority. Foster carers and children are encouraged to attend reviews to give feedback although one carer stated she felt undermined by her offer of input on one occasion. Case files also evidenced that contact with family is promoted and supported, where appropriate. Individual members of staff have been involved in the supervision of family contact although one carer thought there was some confusion regarding her foster child's arrangement. Foster children are encouraged to give feedback to the agency following a review and annual day out. Sampled questionnaires confirmed young people feel able to give their views and opinions and feel listened to. The agency keep foster carers and children informed at supervision visits, carer's meetings and via newsletters sent out to carers. Carers and children evidenced they are visited unannounced by the agency and given the opportunity to talk in confidence alone with their supervising social worker. Foster carers and children were very happy with the amount of supervision they received from the agency. The agency offer 24 hours support and files confirmed the agency are prompt with their responses to any issues that arise. Three carers confirmed that when called the agency responded appropriately.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Files evidenced when pathway plans had been drawn up the cares encourage young people to complete daily living skills in the preparation of independent living, although this is sometimes not seen as a high priority to the young person. One young person confirmed he was encouraged to participate in minor house improvements with his foster parent. The two case files sampled evidenced the summary of work undertaken at review in relation to the foster child in respect of health, education and leisure needs.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency has recently been recommended for Pan-London approval, who confirmed the agency is well-run and provides a good service to looked after children. The Statement of Purpose, Carer's Handbook and Children's Guide have been updated to include new staffing arrangements and Ofsted contact details. Two foster child confirmed they received a guide and a lot of support from the agency when first placed. Quality assurance is given a priority with

changes happening as a result of feedback. The Registered Manager is hoping to progress the service now her (NVQ) training is completed. Both staff and foster carers are supportive of the Registered Manager and confirmed she is approachable, supportive and professional. One carer confirmed the Registered Manager likes things to be done properly. The agency staff are supported formally and informally to help them carry out their roles and the frequency of one-to-one supervision is met as recommended in the National Minimum Standards. One staff member confirmed she received fortnightly supervision from the Registered Manager. Training is a priority and benefits the staff and carers in successfully being able to work with young people with different needs. The agency arranges regular coffee mornings for carers who confirmed the meetings are invaluable. Records sampled evidenced clear managerial oversight and it is evident the Registered Manager clearly monitors practice within the agency. The Registered Manager has the appropriate skills, qualifications and experience to run the agency and able to delegate responsibilities to her staff providing a stable and secure service. The management of the agency provides good systems and support for the staff and young people.

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.