

Ryancare Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jill Marriott
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Address	Oak House 5a Wellington Road Wanstead London E11 2An
Telephone number	020 8989 4970
Email	
Registered person	Adrian Paul Ryan
Registered manager	Sharon Maureen Williams
Responsible individual	
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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

Ryancare Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency operating from an office based in the London Borough of Redbridge. The service has been operational since 2002. The agency provides short and long term fostering for children between birth to 18 years of age. All placements are commissioned by a local authority and Ryancare Fostering Limited subscribe to the Pan London Agreement. The service aims to meet the identified needs of children and young people placed with them and to fully support foster carers within that task. The agency operates with a small experienced team of staff who have a broad range of knowledge and skills. The agency places a strong emphasis on support, training and supervision for staff and carers with the aim of providing a high and consistent standard of care for children and young people.

Summary

This announced inspection focussed on the key fostering standards. Ryancare continue to provide outstanding services which maintain the stability of children in placement.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Ryancare provides outstanding services for children and carers. Since the last inspection the agency has approved more carers and has increased the numbers of children placed. Suitably qualified and experienced social workers have been recruited to ensure children and carers are appropriately supported. The work premises have been extended to provide more space for meetings, training and support groups.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Ryancare Fostering Ltd have appropriate policies and procedures in place related to the health needs of children placed with them and these are included in the foster carers handbook. Carers confirmed that they receive good support from the agency and are clear about their role in relation to the health of children and young people. Surveys returned from education and social work professionals confirm that the agency keeps in contact with schools and local authority social workers with regard to the health of children placed with them. The 'skills to foster' training undertaken by all foster carers includes health topics and the agency provides a range of short courses and training related to food and nutrition, personal hygiene, diet, basic health care and first aid. The manager confirmed that all children and young people have access to primary health care treatment and are registered with a local GP. Consent for medical treatment is obtained from the relevant placing authority one copy is kept with the child and another is kept on the child's file at the agency. Children's care plans include information regarding specific health problems and how these will be addressed. Where appropriate young people are included in review meetings and discussion regarding their health needs. Carers are supported to keep health records for all children in their care and they are expected to provide health details for child care reviews and planning meetings.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

It was clear from the agency policies and procedures and from the records examined during the inspection that all required checks are carried out during the initial recruitment process for all staff. Relevant references and checks are recorded for the management team, the staff team and the foster carers. Records show that the agency has an appropriate recruitment, induction and probationary procedure which ensures the suitability, skills and qualifications of workers for their posts. The clear information given by the responsible person and the Registered Manager throughout the inspection demonstrated their suitability to manage the agency. All prospective foster carers attend the skills to foster training, a detailed assessment is made with regard to their skills and ability to foster. Health and safety checks of the carers homes are carried out each year by an independent person. Unannounced visits are also carried out yearly. The home environment is also monitored each month by the support social worker during supervision visits. The fostering service has systems in place to ensure children and carers are appropriately matched. Placements are visited at least monthly and usually more often. Young people are seen by the support social worker from the agency at least on every second visit. Children and carers are encouraged to attend and participate in child care reviews and planning meetings where any issues related to the placement can be identified and discussed. The agency has systems in place to support both trans-racial and trans-cultural placements. Where a match is made with carers who cannot meet the child's overall needs related to ethnicity, religion, cultural, language and disability a plan is developed at the initial planning meeting to ensure the placement is appropriately supported. The agency has robust policies and procedures in place related to safe care and these are included in the foster carers handbook. Safe care is discussed with foster carers, families and children placed when appropriate. Safe care training is available through the agency and a refresher course has been confirmed with carers for February 2008. The agency has a training programme for the year. Information is given to carers at support groups and home visits with regard to new legislation and updated policies and procedures. Safe care is also covered in the fostering preparation training. Carers and staff confirmed that they have received training, information and support with regard to behaviour management, children missing from home, bullying and identifying abuse and working with children who have been abused. Carers confirmed that they are made aware of the policy regarding corporal punishment and understand that it is not acceptable. Carers were able to describe the policies and procedures in place related to children missing from care, complaints, incidents, accidents and allegations. Records of incidents are kept by the agency and monitored monthly. All issues recorded have been dealt with appropriately within given timescales. Foster carers are provided with full information regarding children placed with them at the beginning of each placement. The agency has a children's guide to the service and where possible children are introduced in an appropriate planned way to the foster carers home. However, approximately two thirds of the placements made in the 12 months up until the end of July 2007 have been made in an emergency. In these cases, placement plans were established as soon as possible following the start of placement. The panel was not observed during this inspection, however, the minutes of the last two panels were examined and these showed that the panel was quorate on both occasions. The panel is well balanced in terms of ethnic and gender mix and comprises of relevant professionals who ensure that appropriate overall guidance is available regarding each agenda item. Records show that panel members are appropriately recruited and receive a period of induction and training with regard to their role. The duty of the foster panel is to recommend approval of foster carers; carry out yearly foster carer reviews; recommend

de-registration of carers; quality assure reports and information given to panel to ensure accurate recommendations can be made to the agency decision maker.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager and staff working for this agency have extensive knowledge and experience of working with children from a range of different backgrounds. Care plans seen show that children and young people are appropriately placed. Specific plans are in place to support trans-racial and trans-cultural placements. Foster carers are made aware of the need to build the confidence of looked after children. A range of training related to empowering children is available and undertaken by all carers. Records show that carers support young people in placement to attend clubs such as brownies and cubs. Children also attend out of school activities such as swimming, cinema, skating, dance and karate. On occasion extra funding is available for holidays. The agency holds a family fun day each summer for children and carers past and present. All young people placed by the agency are attending school. Foster carers are made aware of their role with regard to the educational needs of young people and have received a range of appropriate training to help them to support the children placed with them. Carers are expected to keep in contact with the schools, attend school open evenings and personal education planning meetings and to ensure that young people complete homework. Carers confirmed that they understand their role in supporting the educational needs of young people placed with them. Ryancare does not provide short breaks or respite care for children living with their families.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Placement plans for young people set out how the agency will meet their assessed needs. Where appropriate young people are supported to maintain contact with their families. Young people interviewed confirmed that they understand the contact arrangements for them. Carers have training and are supported to understand what contact might mean to the children placed with them. Information is also included in the foster carers handbook. The agency promotes consultation with young people and support social workers meet with them regularly during supervision visits to the carers home. Children also discuss their placements with the independent reviewing officers from their placing authority who chair child care reviews. Where appropriate children are encouraged to contribute to the annual review of the foster carer they are placed with. The foster carers handbook and the children's guide to service both include information to ensure young people and foster carers know how to raise concerns and make complaints. The agency has an appropriate complaints procedure in place.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

All young people placed by the agency are encouraged to be involved in planning for their future. Support social workers meet regularly with them to talk through care plans and discuss any issues which may arise. Children's files where appropriate include pathway plans to support them to learn independent living skills, and these are discussed with the carer and monitored at child care reviews. Information seen shows that younger children are encouraged to help with cooking and keeping their rooms tidy, while older young people are introduced to budgeting, healthy living, further education and work opportunities. Children's placement and

care plans show how each young person will be supported by the foster carer to achieve maximum independence for their age. The agency has a robust training programme in place which includes working with young people towards independent living. Carers confirmed that they receive allowances and agreed expenses for the young people placed with them. Payments are made promptly and at agreed times. The agency has an appropriate policy on fostering allowances and keeps computerised records and hard copies of all allowances paid. Copies of the policy and a breakdown of the rates paid to carers are included in the foster carers handbook. Payment rates are reviewed annually.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency has an up to date Statement of Purpose which meets the required standards and is reviewed annually. There are clear lines of accountability in place. The manager and the staff team understand their roles and are aware of the needs of young people and the carers with day to day responsibility. There are regular monthly case planning meetings held where placements made with the agency are monitored and reviewed. Records show that each member of staff is appropriately qualified for their post and all social work staff are registered with the General Social Care Council. Each member of staff has an induction and undertakes a six month probationary period at the beginning of their employment. Files show that staff have regular supervision and an appraisal which is reviewed each year. All members of staff and carers have access to appropriate training. Foster carers are undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in child care. There has been a slow start to this particular training and the course details have had to be changed. The agency has recently acquired an appropriate NVQ course and a rolling programme is in place to give all carers the opportunity to undertake this level of training. The agency has grown over the past year and two social workers have been recruited to ensure the service can meet the needs of all of the carers and young people. There is a clear strategy in place for working with carers. Carers confirmed that they are treated with respect and kept informed of agency developments and of any legislation which may affect them. Carers said they are visited regularly by their support social worker and talked about information leaflets and booklets sent to them recently with regard to child protection. The agency has an effective 24 hour emergency on call support system in place. There is a clear policy regarding records and what information should be kept on children and carers files. Children's records seen during the inspection are well maintained. Each file has a front sheet with appropriate information about the child and details of professionals involved. The surveys returned to Ofsted from professionals using Ryancare all recall a good working relationship with the agency. They record good communication and regular discussion with the support social workers. Carers said that they are given all the information available to the agency at the start of each placement with regard to the child's health, education, religion, ethnicity, language, gender and race. Placement plans are developed as soon as is possible and usually within the first three days. These are discussed during home visits. Each carer is required to keep daily records for each child placed with them. The administrative records for the agency are in excellent order. They are easily accessible both on computer and hard copy files. The office manager and the social work manager review the policies procedures and systems in place each month to ensure they are up to date. During the inspection appropriate administrative records in relation to complaints, accidents, incidents, fire safety, recruitment, unannounced visits and policies and procedures were seen. The agency has a confidentiality policy in place; all records are kept securely in locked cabinets. All staff, carer's and independent consultants recruited for specific work are required to sign a declaration with regard to the agencies codes of confidentiality. Ryancare

employ an independent person to inspect the service at least annually, to monitor the services provided and ensure a good standard of care and support is provided for children and their carers.

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.