

Fostering Matters Ltd (known as FosteringMatters)

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC061740
Inspection date	23/11/2012
Inspector	Peter Harrell
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	3 College Green, Gloucester, GL1 2LR
------------------------	--------------------------------------

Telephone number	01452309210
Email	contactus@fosteringmatters.com
Registered person	Fostering Matters
Registered manager	Michael John Castledine
Responsible individual	Eileen McKay
Date of last inspection	07/01/2008

© Crown copyright 2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

FosteringMatters is a small privately owned independent fostering agency. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children and young people, including sibling groups and parent and child arrangements. There are currently 61 children placed; There are 86 approved foster carers in 51 households.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

This independent fostering agency provides an adequate level of foster care for the children and young people who are looked after.

There is a strong commitment to supporting experienced staff and a broad range of foster carers, who are both well trained and supervised. Young people make progress, in relation to their educational commitment and emotional well-being. The service's strengths lie in: placement support; a committed staff team; a diverse range of carers and helping children and young people to progress well.

Conversely, significant shortfalls are highlighted regarding the functioning of several aspects concerned with the agency's fostering panel. This is combined with a low level of foster carers' attendance at these meetings.

There is a mixed response regarding views of the quality of service provided and an effective complaints procedure is not embedded in the service. Foster carers express that they do not always receive full information about children placed with them; members of staff are involved in matching and referrals and have not been specifically trained in this complex area of work. Further recommendations are made regarding corrections to the Children's Guide and ensuring that there is a Statement of Purpose that focuses on outcomes for Children and Young People.

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
18 (2011)	The registered person must ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 18(4))	31/01/2013
24 (2011)	ensure that the fostering panel makes a written record of the reasons for its recommendations; in particular, make sure that the minutes are clear, concise and support in sufficient detail, the recommendations made (Regulation 24 (2))	31/01/2013
24 (2011)	The fostering panel must also oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and give advice and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it (Regulation 25(4)(b)(c))	31/01/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure 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 each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority (NMS 3.9)
- ensure the fostering panel provide a formal quality assurance feedback to the fostering service on the quality of reports being presented to panel (NMS 14.2)
- make sure foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity and actively encouraged to attend and be heard at all panel meetings, at which their approval is being discussed, both initial approval and annual review of their approval and to bring a supporter to the panel if they wish (NMS 14.5)
- ensure that the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children and young people (NMS 16.2)
- ensure the children's guide includes how a child can contact the Children's Rights

Director (NMS 16.4)

- make sure, where a child requires it, that the children's guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative forms of communication e.g translation into another language (NMS 16.6)
- ensure assessment and appraisal of staff involved in fostering work takes account of identified skills needed for particular roles, for example, the matching process of children and young people with foster carers, and is used to identify individuals' learning and development needs (NMS 23.5)
- ensure that each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance (NMS 23.11).

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **adequate**.

Children and young people say that they like living with their carers and feel safe. One young person said, 'our carer's link worker is very kind and helpful.' Wherever possible, young people are placed together with their brothers or sisters. Children and young people have developed well, both socially and emotionally, in foster placements which meet their diverse range of need.

The stability of placements is considered carefully by the service. Foster carers receive support from the fostering staff team which enables them to be equipped to meet children and young people's individual needs. Young people experience as few unplanned endings to their placements as possible. However, young people are not fully able to influence what is happening to them. The agency does not engage young people in more frequent and planned consultation outside of their statutory looked after child review meetings.

Almost all young people regularly attend school or college. Children and young people's future aspirations are actively promoted by their carers. When considering their starting points, young people are progressing well. There are examples of young people achieving good examination results; a young person spoke very proudly about the support received from his carers, to achieve ten GCSEs and recent good progress at college.

The agency ensures that unaccompanied asylum seeking young people maintain their culture, together with learning new skills. This means that some young people are more confident to pursue college courses and careers opportunities, which would have previously not been open to them.

Several young people have remained with their foster carers after their 18th birthday, which the service has been successful in arranging. This results in young people gaining further chances to enhance their skills for independence at a pace to suit their specific needs. Some young people have regular contact with their birth

families; they are supported by carers in maintaining these important links and are transported to contact meetings, in accordance with their care plans.

There are specifically trained and assessed carers who provide parent and child placements. This makes available, for placing authorities, carers, who will both assess parents' parenting capacity and provide parenting skills advice, making sure young children have the best chance to remain with birth families, as well as keeping them safe and well cared for.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

The agency recruits, assesses and supports carers from a broad range of backgrounds and life experiences, to meet the needs of young people. A staff member said, 'social workers and carers are a team, people want to help each other here.' Assessments of foster carers are written clearly to show the suitability and competences of applicants to carry out the fostering task. Most assessments are completed within recommended timescales. Concerns regarding carers are challenged by bringing matters to the fostering panel. As a result of this, the agency employs a range of carers who have an understanding of how to promote positive outcomes for young people.

Overall, the functioning of the fostering panel is not rigorous. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of assessments presented have not been formalised. Minutes of panel meetings do not explicitly record the reasons for recommendations of foster carers and do not record in sufficient detail any discussions of issues raised by panel members.

Attendance at the panel by prospective and approved carers is low which means they are not able to put their views across. There have not been any opportunities provided for panel members to take part in training, or to receive appraisals. These shortfalls all impact on the panel's ability to make sure that the suitability of carers is thoroughly explored to ensure that appropriate and child-centred recommendations are made. The agency has developed the arrangements for the panel's constitution and terms of reference; however, as these have not yet been implemented the impact of these on young people is not yet apparent.

In order to enhance the care and welfare of children and young people, foster carers say that they have access to a range of education and health services. The majority of carers say that they are assisted to meet the needs of children and young people in line with their care plans. A carer said, 'I am part of a close knit agency, there is so much support.' Visits from the agency's social workers take place regularly and there is frequent telephone contact. In order to further their skills and knowledge, the majority of approved carers have completed the Childcare Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards in foster care qualification. Shared experiences of fostering are discussed in support group meetings which regularly take place and carers enjoy attending.

Foster carers say that they get frustrated when they do not always get all the necessary information about the young people they are asked to look after from their placing authority. This impacts on their ability to be properly equipped to look after children and young people, or for them to remain settled in their new homes. The agency does attempt to gain more details, although more strident attempts need to be made in this regard to ensure there are stable and well matched placements.

Most Carers enjoy positive relationships with the agency. However, there has been some feedback, from a minority of carers and one placing authority, expressing reservations regarding the quality of the service. For example, a local authority social worker said that some of the agency's social workers were 'a challenge to work with. This is a hindrance for the implementation of care plans, which should, in my view, be a team effort'. A placing authority commissioner said 'unfortunately, the feedback has not been good' and a carer commented 'I don't always think the stability of the children already in placement is taken into consideration, when being offered new placements'. Although these responses are from a small proportion of respondents, they demonstrate that young people may, on rare occasions, not always be provided with a consistently positive level of care from the service.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Children and young people report feeling safe. They say that they do not experience bullying. They also say they know who to talk to in order to raise concerns and complain regarding any aspects of their care. There is a complaints procedure and log book in place. No complaints have been raised by children or young people. However, entries in the log book are not dated and it is not clear whether any concerns or complaints made by foster carers were investigated and resolved.

Foster carers' training, as part of their preparation, includes a focus on safe caring and safeguarding practices. There is a detailed programme of training in place, which happens both before and after approval. Carers say there is lots of training related to safeguarding available to them, this ensures that they acquire an understanding of child protection, and also gain an awareness of the impact of abuse and neglect has on the behaviour and development of children and young people.

Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place, after approval, at least once a year and are recorded individually in foster carers' records. Staff recruitment and vetting is detailed, well organised and recorded clearly so that staff appointed are vetted correctly and are aware of their responsibilities to keep looked after children and young people safe.

There are several incidences of young people going missing. Whenever this happens foster carers are aware of their responsibility to report children missing from their care and the procedures to be followed. In order to minimise incidents when young people are absent from their carers' homes, the office manager and a social worker

of the service have developed a close working relationship with the police in local areas. Carers take seriously the safety of looked after children and young people who go missing and attempt to ensure a swift return to their placement.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

The Registered Manager, responsible individual, and office manager, work closely together to evaluate and monitor the quality of this small service. There are plans in place that identify areas the service wants to develop and respond to. Managers of the service regularly read and check service users' records to look at emerging practice issues and they ensure that these are addressed with social work staff during supervision. This overview ensures that foster carers are being supported properly, as well as keeping young people safe.

The administrative and social work staff of the agency are regularly supported and supervised. An induction process is in place for new staff, to equip them with skills they need to supervise and train foster carers, and to make sure that fostered children's needs are at the forefront of the service. Appraisals of social workers take place yearly. The manager of the service is a professionally qualified, registered social worker who has experience in childcare management and has the appropriate management qualification. These levels of support and management make sure that children receive consistent care from carers whose work is supervised. However, the tasks of: taking referrals; meeting placing authority commissioners; and matching children and young people with carers, is carried out by unqualified staff. Although this is closely monitored by management, staff involved in this are not fully trained for this specific and complex area of work.

Foster carers regularly attend support group meetings and training courses. This ensures that children and young people are cared for by knowledgeable carers. Managers of the service have developed a working relationship with other agencies, in particular placing authorities local to their premises. This helps to ensure that there is a joint and collaborative approach when considering the needs of looked after children. Although, a more active approach needs to be made to ensure that carers get all the information they need relating to the children and young people who are placed with them.

The Statement of Purpose and Children and young person's guide describe the aims and objectives of the service and have been regularly updated. However, the Statement of Purpose does not state sufficiently how with the service meets outcomes for children. The children's guide does not describe how a child or young person can contact their independent reviewing officer or the Children's Rights Director and the contact details of Ofsted are incorrect. This provides incomplete or inaccurate information to those who read it. English is not the first language for some young people who are placed with foster carers; they would be better equipped, if the children's guide was translated into their first language.

Most of the three requirements and five recommendations made following the last inspection have been met. There was a requirement made with reference to the quality assurance function of the panel being understood, implemented and maintained. This is reinforced at this inspection, where there are a further three requirements and nine recommendations.

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 and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

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 independent fostering agencies.