

Ryancare Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Ryancare Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency based in Wanstead, East London. The service has been in operation since 2002; joining two other independent fostering agencies in 2008. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for individual and sibling group placement, emergency and short and long term placements. The agency also provides parent and child placements.

The fostering service aims to ensure 'children and young people can expect quality, consistency and continuity in all aspects of their family life'.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering service had 32 approved fostering households with 44 looked after children 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**.

The inspection finds that this fostering agency offers a good quality service with some outstanding features. In particular the experiences, progress and outcomes for children and young people are excellent.

Looked after children lead very healthy lifestyles and are well protected from harm or

abuse. The service excels in promoting the educational attainment of children and young people and they enjoy a creative, exciting wide range of leisure activities. Children and young people are very keenly involved in decision making about their lives, and the service promotes very effective consultation with looked after children and foster carers.

The service negotiates and maintains very successful and stable foster care placements. Children and young people, including several sibling groups have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. Unplanned endings are very rare. As a result, children and young people thrive in safe and stable placements, enjoying relationships that are nurturing and positive.

Safeguarding practice and monitoring is a priority in this fostering agency. There are effective, proactive systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from harm or abuse. Thorough assessments of foster carers' skills are conducted and robust risk assessments are carried out. These ensure that children and young people's welfare is promoted and that they experience positive outcomes.

The agency's recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers are sound. Staff are well supported and supervised and their partnership working with internal and external professionals is very effective. The fostering panel is organised and efficiently run. Staff and foster carers have access to quality training opportunities.

The leadership of the service is strong and managers have good insight into the strengths of the service and any areas they feel require development. The entire staff team remain committed and passionate about providing a fostering service to children and young people that expertly meets their placement needs.

This inspection notes some shortfalls. These relate to the frequency of supervisory visits to some foster carers; revision to the children's guide; increase to the service's current pool of foster carers and to review the format of support group operation. Improvements are required to foster carers' personal and development plans and not all foster carers have achieved training support and development standards within the specified 12 month timeframe. The fostering panel does not include representation from child health and not all safe care policies are specific to individual children and young people in placement.

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
4	keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the children's	01/05/2015

(2011)	guide (Regulation 4(a))	
17 (2011)	provide foster parents with such advice, information and support necessary in the interests of children placed with them. In particular that staff consistently complete regular supervisory visits. (Regulation 17(1))	01/05/2015

Recommendations

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

- consider devising safe-caring/family policies that address the risks and placements issues for individual children and young people in placement (NMS 4.1)
- increase the pool of foster carers in order to meet the diverse needs of Looked After Children and in order to achieve the aims and objectives as outlined in the statement of purpose (NMS 13.1)
- review the support group meeting format to include meetings that are occasionally facilitated by foster carers (NMS 21.4)
- ensure foster carers attain the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)
- consider recruiting to the fostering panel a representative experienced in the field of child health. (NMS 14.8)

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

The experiences, progress and outcomes for children and young people are excellent. Young people enjoy stable and well matched placements and placement disruption is very rare. Children and young people participate in sensitively planned introductions with their new foster carers and they have ample opportunity to explore for themselves the appropriateness and benefits of proposed placements. One young person said, '(X) has made all the difference in my life. I love living with her and I know she cares for me'.

Children and young people receive individualised care that meets their needs well and this results in extremely positive outcomes. They feel safe and at ease living within their fostering families and develop strong attachments. They know how complaints are to be made; no complaint has been received from a looked after child for a significant length of time. Children and young people grow in confidence and learn to take responsibility for their behaviour. They settle quickly into their placements and have a strong sense of belonging.

Children and young people are carefully matched to their foster placements to

ensure that individual needs are clearly identified and met. There is a formal, centralised process in place and the matching exercise is robustly conducted in each case. Staff make good use of matching recording tools that highlight how matching decisions are reached, these include a SWOT analysis of each potential placement highlighting strengths, weaknesses and any risks posed. This is important to ensure that decision-making is clear, transparent and is in the best interest of the child and young person. The agency is persistent in its request for comprehensive information from placing authorities to help them and foster carers make the most appropriate placements. Where information from the placing authority is not received, staff make vigorous efforts to retrieve missing information.

Children and young people receive information about the agency, usually prior to the placement start. The agency's children's guide however, requires revision to ensure the information can be easily understood by all ages; in particular those children who are primary school aged. Children and young people have access to clear and updated information about the foster family selected to care for them. Introductions between the two parties are carefully and sensitively co-ordinated. This helps settle children and young people into their new surroundings and supports a positive placement start.

Looked After Children have very good opportunities to express their wishes, feelings and views prior to and throughout their placements. The agency makes exceptional efforts to ensure that children and young people have appropriate means to communicate their opinions. They are encouraged to express their views through review meetings, with their social worker, foster carers, and supervising social worker. Children and young people have access to independent advocacy when there is a need. There are firm arrangements in place to creatively capture children and young people's views to ensure they have influence the care they receive. These arrangements include the periodic distribution of feedback forms and consultation via special events and fun days. This ensures that as the service continues to develop, and that those who the service seeks to care for, have the opportunity to use their expertise and experiences to help shape the service in a meaningful way.

Children and young people have excellent opportunities to develop a positive self-view and emotional resilience. A good illustration of this is some young people's active participation in the agency's recent Ryancare's Got Talent event, which saw a number of looked after children co-ordinating and performing before packed audiences. Children and young people have a good understanding of their ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and their identity needs are well addressed while in placement. For example, they are encouraged to participate in their chosen places of worship if they so wish, and have access to relevant faith books. Foster carers routinely help children and young people embrace and celebrate their cultural heritage. For example, by international flag making; acknowledging key celebratory dates, such as days of independence and by providing traditional, culturally appropriate meals.

Children and young people live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and social wellbeing is promoted. They have excellent access to primary

health care services and receive advice and support from specialist services where this is required, for example, to manage issues such as diabetes. Each child and young person is provided with a health passport to help chart key health care and medical events. The passport remains with each child so there is a documented health care history, that they are encouraged to update themselves. In relation to their emotional health, children and young people also have good access to mental health professionals such as clinical psychologists for mental health assessments and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for on-going support and counselling. Documented health care plans ensure that children and young people gain the advice, support and treatment they need, when they need it.

Children and young people achieve educational success and their academic progress increases the longer the placement continues. 100% of children and young people of school-attending age currently are engaged with educational provision, and most enjoy 100% school/college attendance. This is a remarkable achievement. Children and young people benefit from the agency's commitment to promoting educational success, which in turn motivates them to be ambitious and aim high. Some young people make exceptional academic progress since being in placement and have received high recognition from their schools and the agency itself.

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of creative and exciting interests and recreational activities. These routinely include sports, music, dance, participation in local events, air cadets, scouts etc. In addition children and young people very much enjoy social events and activities organised and funded by the fostering agency. The annual weekend trip to 'Stubbers' is an opportunity for Looked After Children to have fun and attempt individual and group challenges that promote increased self-esteem, self-confidence and effective partnership working. The agency regularly involves children and young people and their entire foster families in attending fun days, social events, festive and religious celebrations. Foster carers routinely organise family holidays, of which some are abroad; school holiday and weekly after school leisure activities.

Children and young people are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic well-being. Foster carers generally provide children and young people with opportunities to take measured risks and to learn skills that promote independence. These are appropriate to their age and ability. Early in the placement children and young people are encouraged to develop practical skills and emotional strategies to support them taking personal responsibility for their actions and behaviour. In relation to developing independence, older young people benefit from their foster carers assisting them to develop skills which aid their independence when they move on. Young people are engaged with their pathway plans and the agency supports the development of independent skills via its semi-independence programme and the involvement of key agency personnel to, for example, assist them to understand and better manage their finances.

Whenever possible the agency tries to place sibling groups together. Where this is not the case they enjoy safe and appropriate access to family members and others who are significant to them. This is important to ensure that children and young

people remain connected to their family of origin and to assist with the development of a positive identity. Children and young people very much feel loved and well cared for by their foster families; they benefit from the security and permanence of being placed long term with their foster carers, some are subject to Special Guardianship Orders, while others have been adopted by their foster carers.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The quality of care offered is good and this contributes to the positive experiences and progress made by children and young people. Foster carers enjoy sound, relationships with children and young people in their care and are committed to supporting them meet their full potential. One foster carer comments 'My foster children are my children and are a part of my family. That's it'.

The fostering service recruits a small number of foster carers each year, which is in line with service objectives. However the agency will need to increase its current pool of foster carers to meet the diverse needs of child and young people seeking foster care placements and in order to fulfil the aims and objectives of its statement of purpose.

The fostering service ensures prospective foster carers are robustly recruited and assessed to ensure they are well equipped to safely meet the needs of children and young people. Applicant's preparation is thorough and conducted with appropriate depth and rigor. Foster care assessments are comprehensive, analytical and identify the competencies and strengths foster carers have or need to develop. All assessments and approvals have been completed in a timely manner; foster carers are clear about their role and the roles of the agency and local authority.

Foster carers receive good quality support from staff through visits, telephone calls, supervision and support groups. Foster carers feel highly valued within the agency. They feel a key strength of the agency is the support they receive to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. Feedback received from foster carers has been extremely positive. One foster care comments, 'The staff here have got my back, especially when there are struggles with the local authority. They are supportive and listen to my point of view'. Another foster carer says of the agency, 'They guided me through the whole process, I got full support and I feel that they genuinely care - for me and my family, 24/7'. Some foster carers however, express a desire for the support group format to be reviewed, and include the option for the group to be facilitated by foster carers themselves, independent of the staff team.

Foster carers are very well trained to meet children and young people's identified needs. All approved foster carers have achieved the required formal training. Where foster carers require specific skills to care for a particular young person, for example due to medical issues, staff work hard to ensure specialist training and support is provided. The fostering agency offers all foster carers a quality programme of training and development which is relevant to their experience and knowledge base.

All foster carers have achieved the Training, Support and Development Standards, although not all have been completed within the specified 12 month timescale. In addition, foster carers' personal development plans are insufficiently detailed and do not explicitly set out how they will be supported to meet development objectives. Foster carers have the opportunity to complete higher level diploma training that enhances high standard of care practices. This is greatly appreciated by foster carers.

The supervision of foster carers is good. Case files evidence that supervisory visits are largely completed consistently and address all pertinent placement issues, with a strong focus on safeguarding. The inspection finds however, that during the past year, the frequency of some supervisory visits to foster carers have been variable; with some significant gaps where no visit has taken place. This is not in the best interest of children and young people in placement.

Foster carers understand and demonstrate that they can help children and young people feel part of their family and enjoy themselves. Foster carers maintain contact and positive working relationships with parents, often despite significant challenges. The agency has recently implemented a new respite policy, which facilitates formal, necessary breaks from caring for Looked After Children. Staff plan to ensure that the use of respite periods are always in the best interest of children, young people and the placement. Some foster carers indicate that they are unlikely to make use of respite as they consider the child they care for to be akin to that of their own birth children. This demonstrates the keen level of attachment between foster carers and those they look after.

The fostering service's fostering panel functions efficiently and effectively in making recommendations about the suitability of potential foster carers. In recent months the service's fostering panel has been re-structured with one amalgamated fostering panel serving the organisation's, three independent fostering services. The fostering panel is comprised of qualified and experienced practitioners in their appropriate fields of expertise. These fields however, do not include a representative from child (physical) health, which would be of particular benefit to panel consideration of the re-approval of foster carers. The fostering service has relevant policies and procedures in place and panel members receive an induction and periodic training. The fostering service ensures that the vetting of panel members is robust and that members are suitable to participate in the process. Foster carers and children benefit from the services clear policies and procedures with regard to the purpose and operation of panel meetings. These are appropriately quorate and its administration is sound. The Responsible Individual, a qualified and experienced social worker, is the agency decision-maker; there have been no issues ratifying panel meeting recommendations.

Foster carers are committed to including children and young people within their family life and long-term arrangements are in place to provide permanence to young people. Partnership working is very effective and foster carers understand their roles and accountabilities. Looked after children benefit from very personalised care provided by the fostering service in accordance with the placing authority's care plan,

ensuring that their identified needs are very well met by the service. Foster carers work with local authority social workers and supervising social workers within the agreed delegated authority. The fostering service has devised a system and recording tool that explicitly outlines tasks delegated to foster carers, agreed by all parties. This ensures that timely decisions are made in the best interest of children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The fostering service staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people is paramount. Foster carers are wholly committed to developing positive relationships with children and young people and generate a culture of openness and trust. Staff ensure that consistently, throughout each placement, children and young people's safety and well-being is regularly reviewed and monitored. Comprehensive placement plans and risk assessments ensure changing needs are identified and strategies are put in place to address them. The service will benefit however, from devising individual safe care/family policies that address children and young people's specific individual risks and issues as opposed to general safe care policies for each fostering household.

The agency has clear, comprehensive and effective policies and procedures in place to ensure that young people are safe. Foster carers and the fostering staff team are familiar with these procedures and act in accordance with them when required. The fostering service works in close partnership with local authorities to ensure they comply with local missing from care protocols. Incidents of young people missing from placement are low.

The fostering service has strong and effective working partnership with other agencies such as the police, education and health professionals which protect those children and young people who engage in risk-taking behaviour. This acts to promote an effective co-ordinated approach to safeguarding children and young people.

The fostering service has safeguarding and children and young people's safety and welfare at the forefront of all its work. As a consequence, child protection forms a significant part of the work undertaken in the recruitment, preparation, assessment and supervision of carers. Foster carers receive a range of safeguarding training, which starts during their Skills to Foster preparation course and continues throughout their fostering career. The staff team routinely ensure that supervisory visits explore and scrutinize issues of child protection as do staff case supervision sessions, foster carers annual reviews and LAC reviews. Staff regularly interview children and young people in private to obtain their views of placement progress and issues. Staff routinely complete, two or more unannounced home visits to each fostering household per year. This is to further monitor the appropriateness and safety of fostering placements.

Allegations against foster carers are infrequent. When these occur they are handled

appropriately, and in accordance with established child protection procedures. The fostering service's monitoring of such incidents is thorough.

The fostering service is managed by individuals who are well experienced and qualified to do so. Both the Responsible Individual and manager are experienced, qualified social workers with a strong background in child care, child protection and the fostering task. The manager is in the process of being registered with Ofsted.

The agency is a fair and competent employer with sound employment practices. The fostering service currently has contracts with independent qualified social workers recruited to complete foster carer assessments and present prospective foster carers at the fostering panel. Staff receive regular supervision that addresses individual needs as they complete assessments.

Children benefit from the fostering service's robust recruitment and vetting practices. The agency's human resources policies and practices have been reviewed and systems have improved since the last inspection. This ensures individuals working with the service are deemed suitable to work with children. The service has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures in place that ensure the careful selection and vetting of staff, foster carers and those identified on the agency's central list. The fostering service's personnel files for these individuals evidence full vetting checks as required by the regulations.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The leadership and management of this fostering service is good. Managers and leaders of the service are committed to providing quality foster care placements for looked after children and young people. The fostering service's manager is a qualified social worker, with extensive fostering, supervisory and training experience. The staff team overwhelmingly describe the management of the service as being excellent.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is comprehensive and up to date. It accurately describes the service's aims objectives and facilities and is provided to interested parties as well as being available on the agency's website. The fostering service provides clear and creative information to children and young people but the children's guide requires revision to ensure information is easily understood by all ages. The fostering service is financially sound and its business plan outlines plans for the service's future. In order to fully meet the aims and objectives of the service's statement of purpose, an increase in the recruitment of foster carers is required.

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer with sound employment practices. The management team provide excellent support and supervision to its staff group. Managers have an open door policy and are readily available to the staff team, foster carers and children and young people. One staff member comments, 'What keeps me here? The mind-set here is very positive. There's stability amongst

foster carers, management and the admin team. It's comfortable and everyone's committed to what they're doing'. Staff have access to comprehensive and creative staff training programme, designed to enhance current practices and develop individual areas of interest. The service ensures any specialist advice and support is made available. Another staff member says of the service, 'I feel safe here. Communication is good and systems are effective. People are working hard, very hard, but it's a friendly atmosphere; you hear a lot of laughter'.

The fostering service has highly effective newly developed quality assurance systems in place, which continue to be improved. This ensures that the fostering service is appropriately monitored and controlled. There is vigorous review and reporting of all aspects of the functioning of the service, which assists to identify potential shortfalls and offer effective remedial action where required. Robust monitoring systems also enhance the fostering service's ability to continually improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people. A good illustration of this is the service's recently implemented outcomes tracking system. The fostering service consistently provides Ofsted and other stakeholders with quality and performance data as required.

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the fostering service to run smoothly. Currently the fostering service is working towards implementing of an improved electronic data base system to better meet the recording and data needs of the service. Managers anticipate that improvements to the IT system will assist in streamlining and improving staff's co-ordination of information and enhance existing monitoring systems.

This fostering service is well run; its overall effectiveness is good, with some outstanding features. The service has a clear vision for its developmental path and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the quality of care provided is of a high standard and that outcomes for children and young people remain excellent.

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.