

Archway Care Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Robert Smith
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Date of last inspection	20 June 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

Archway Care is a small independent fostering agency currently supporting in the region of 23 foster carer households, who offer approximately 53 potential placements for children. Placements are offered on a short, medium or long-term basis across all ages ranges and for children with a wide range of needs. The agency's office is located close to the centre of Milton Keynes and the agency's carers are primarily situated in the local and nearby area authorities. The agency accepts referrals from a wide range of placing authorities in the surrounding region.

Summary

The agency provides a good range of high quality foster placements for referred children. Good attention is paid to health care needs and keeping children safe. Careful attention is paid to matching children with carers and a very good level placement stability is the result. Good support is given to children's educational achievement and arrangements for contact. Good arrangements are in place for consultation with children. The management of the agency is excellent with good levels of staff and staff support, alongside exemplary levels of support for carers. Management oversight and monitoring of children's welfare and practice standards is excellent.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has addressed the recommendation arising for the last inspection in June 2006. Foster carer agreements are now being signed consistently by carers to ensure they are fully aware of the expectations placed upon them. The agency continues to regularly press local authorities to provide all Looked After Children documentation in a timely fashion to ensure carers are fully informed of placed children's needs. Care files now accurately reflect the reasons for termination of placements to ensure the agency has oversight of any patterns of placement breakdown. The agency has further developed policy and procedure for carers to make clear expectations around preparation of young people for leaving care. Other improvements since the last inspection include a move to new premises, which offer better facilities and scope for more private meetings and staff supervision. The agency has appointed a mental health consultant to support carers working with children with mental health care needs. Overall, staffing numbers have been increased in line with the growth of the agency and a specialist post has been established to oversee the management of initial referrals, placement matching and family finding.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency and its carers ensure the health care needs of placed children are properly identified and met consistently. The agency works hard to ensure appropriately detailed medical and health information on referred children is provided to carers. Carers ensure children are registered promptly with local health, dental and optical services and support children's attendance for regular check-ups and health monitoring. The agency is diligent in chasing up placing authorities to ensure annual medical assessments are carried out. The agency has good systems in place, as part of carer supervision meetings and central practice monitoring, to check that health care

needs are being met and that accidents and health related incidents are being dealt with properly by carers. The agency and its carers help identify where additional specialist health support might be needed and work well with placing authorities to help ensure this is both provided and supported. The agency has engaged the services of a child mental health consultant to support and advise carers working with children with mental health concerns. The agency provides carers with access to regular relevant training in first aid and more specific health related matters.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency has appropriate systems in place to safeguard the welfare of children placed with its carers. The persons running the agency are unchanged since the last inspection at which time they were judged as fit for this role and no concerns have arisen about their conduct since. The registered manager has gained a relevant management qualification since the last inspection. The agency ensures carer households are safe and appropriate environments for children to live in, by means of initial and subsequent detailed health and safety assessments and careful attention is paid to issues of bedroom accommodation. The agency carries out unannounced visits to carer households as another means of ensuring suitability of placement arrangements. The agency takes considerable care with the matching of children to placements. Carers confirm that their views are taken fully into account with regard to the appropriateness of placements and care is taken not to go outside approval ranges. Where possible, and appropriate, introductory visits are undertaken. The agency and its carers are commended on the planning for one particular placement visited during the inspection, where lengthy introductions required considerable commitment on the part of the carers, to accommodate local authority expectations. The agency has, since the last inspection, appointed a Resource Coordinator to help manage and speed the process of initial placement enquiry, matching and family finding. The agency has clear child protection procedures in place and provides appropriate guidance and training for staff and carers in this area. When concerns about child welfare and/or carer practice arise the agency usually takes appropriate steps in liaison with placing and area authorities to address concerns in a thorough manner. In one situation the agency had failed to make appropriate notification to the area authority, although the agency had worked well with the placing authority to ensure the concerns identified were investigated and followed up. The agency ensures risk assessments are provided or subsequently carried out with regard to new placements. The agency supports carers in drawing up detailed individual safe care plans to help ensure the needs of children in placement are managed in safe and appropriate ways that minimise risks to all parties concerned. The agency also provides clear guidance for carers on the safe management of behaviour, supported by additional targeted training on behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. Clear guidance is provided for carers on safe management of unauthorised absences, although none have occurred since the last inspection. The agency has robust systems in place for the appointment of staff and carers. These ensure all relevant checks and vetting procedures are carried out prior to commencement of work or the taking on of placements. Interview notes are, however, not being consistently maintained on staff files and staff application forms do not make clear the need to declare convictions. The agency's fostering panel is appropriately constituted and supported by clear procedures and guidance. There is a generally good range of agency and independent representation on the panel, in line with the expectations of the standards, although a current shortfall exists with the lack of representation from a recent or current foster carer. Panel meetings are quorate and are appropriately

challenging to the content and quality of assessments and annual household review reports. Panel members have access to relevant training from time to time.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The agency has recruited carers from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, providing potentially good choices of placement match on grounds of ethnicity and culture. Where this sort of match is not achievable the agency supports carers in ensuring children's diversity needs arising from their backgrounds are met. Carers and staff have had recent access to training on issues of diversity and the agency's own staff team includes members from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The agency does not provide any specific additional education services but does provide consistent support and advice to carers on matters of education. The agency helps ensure all placed children are rapidly found new schools, if required, and makes considerable efforts to ensure Personal Education Plans (PEPS) are provided by placing authorities. Carers provide good support for children's educational progress and achievements and work well in conjunction with children's schools. Where children are out of school the agency can provide sessional support on short term basis if required by carers. The agency has provided additional training for carers on education for looked after children and special needs education. The agency sustains good ongoing monitoring of children's attendance and progress at school and maintains good central monitoring of their educational achievements.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency and its carers provide good support for children's ongoing contact with family and other significant people, where this is agreed part of care plans. Carers provide emotional and practical support for contact sessions and where necessary the agency will provide staff for supervision of these sessions. Carers are also alert to the impact of contact and, where necessary, will advocate on children's behalf to ensure arrangements are meeting their needs appropriately. Feedback from children in surveys confirms they feel appropriately involved and consulted around day to day decision making in their individual foster homes. On a more formal level they can also contribute to carers' household reviews and their own care reviews. The agency also includes survey consultation with placed children as part of quality assurance processes. The agency does not currently have any consultative forums for placed young people, although this is now planned for the near future.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The agency is very well managed and excellent systems are in place to help ensure a consistently high quality of care is provided to placed young people. The agency has an appropriate range of information in place for carers, placed children and referring authorities that clearly and accurately outlines the philosophy and day to day operation of the agency. The agency has a clear and effective management structure in place with clearly defined areas of responsibility and decision-making that staff are familiar with. Staffing levels are maintained at a good level to ensure workloads are safely manageable and staffing levels have increased since the last

inspection to meet the growing demands on the agency. A new post has been introduced to manage initial referrals, matching and family finding to provide a swifter and more co-ordinated approach to this aspect of the agency's work. Staff are very well supported on a day to day basis and provided with consistent and suitably challenging levels of supervision and appraisal of their performance. The agency provides good opportunities for ongoing staff development and training. The agency continues to steadily increase its number of carers to be able to better meet the range of referrals made by placing authorities. Systems for assessment of new carers are thorough and based on the widely used British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) framework. Annual household reviews are conducted within required timescales. Examples of reports drawn up for consideration by the fostering panel for annual reviews did not adequately outline concerns about carers that may have arisen since approval or their last annual household review. As a result panel members might not be fully aware of all risk factors when making their recommendations. The agency provides excellent levels of support for its carers. Carers are provided with a two weekly formal supervision as well as a high level of ongoing telephone contact and additional support at times of particular pressure. There are effective duty systems both in and out of normal office hours and carers confirm the agency maintains excellent level of communication at all times. The agency also provides membership of the Fostering Network, regular foster carer forums, opportunities for respite breaks when needed and social events for carers, their families and placed children. Carers are provided with a detailed carer handbook which provides clear consistent advice on all key areas of fostering practice. The agency provides carers with opportunities for a wide range of training in addition to core basic training undertaken as part of the initial assessment and approval processes. A small number of carers are undertaking National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The agency maintains carer and children's files to a very high standard enabling easy oversight and monitoring of both children's welfare and carers' standards of care. Central records and the carer and child registers are maintained to a similarly high standard. Overall, standards of administrative support and systems are very good. The agency has excellent and very detailed systems for monthly monitoring by the manager of key areas of practice and significant incidents, in line with the expectations of the regulations and standards. This high level of monitoring allied with the regularity of carer supervision ensures an exemplary degree of oversight is maintained of children's welfare in placements. The agency also carries out regular surveys of children, carers and placing authorities to inform its ongoing quality monitoring processes.

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
9	ensure that notifications are consistently made as required by regulations to area authorities (Regulation 43(1)) New	31 December 2007

Recommendations

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

- revise staff application forms to make clear the need to declare convictions and ensure notes of interviews are retained (NMS 15)
- ensure reports for carer household reviews consistently and fully report on any concerns that have arisen with regard to carer practice (NMS 21)

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.