

Archway Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	01/11/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 an independent fostering agency currently supporting 47 foster carer households, that offers 95 potential placements for children. At the time of the inspection 55 children were in placements. 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. At present 17 local authorities have placed children with Archway Care. The fostering agency is working towards recruiting foster carers nationally.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is a good service. Children and young people receive individualised and personal care. The service is tailored to meeting the needs of children and young people. Good support for all children and young people are in place. Children and young people live in a healthy and safe environment. The general organisation around working practice is good and the fostering agency is functioning well. The fostering agency works closely with a number of placing authorities and outside agencies to meet children and young people's holistic needs.

Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering agency was asked to: ensure that notifications of significant events are consistently made as required by regulation; revise the staff application form to make clear the need to declare any convictions; ensure foster carers' reviews include any concerns that have arisen with regard to carer practice. The service has met the previous action and recommendations. This helps to promote the welfare of children and young people in care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people live in a healthy environment and their health needs are met. Children and young people's files provide good information about their health needs. The fostering agency has sound policies and procedures in place to promote the health needs of children and young people in foster care. The agency works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure good outcomes for children and young people. The agency employs a medical advisor who provides advice on health matters to the fostering panel. It also employs a part-time clinical psychologist who provides advice, guidance and support to carers to promote the emotional welfare of

children and young people. The agency also maintains good links with the looked after children's nurses from the various placing authorities and seeks advice and support from them about meeting children and young people's health care needs. The fostering service has access to the children and adolescent mental health service and social workers make referrals to this service as needs arise. However, all children and young people's up-to-date health assessments are not available in children's files for inspection.

Children and young people enjoy healthy and nutritious meals at foster carers' homes. Foster carers encourage and support young people to attend local gyms to keep them physically active and fit. Foster carers accompany children and young people to various medical appointments and maintain records of all appointments they have attended. Foster carers attend health and safety and first aid training and have purchased first aid equipment and fire blankets.

Children and young people live in homes which are warm, well furnished and decorated and maintained to a good level of cleanliness and hygiene. Young people have their own bedroom which affords them a level of privacy; they can decorate these to reflect their individual personality.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people live in a family environment where competent foster carers provide them with a nurturing, stable and safe environment. Children and young people surveyed by Ofsted and spoken to said that they live in safe placements. The fostering agency has appropriate child protection and anti-bullying policies in place. Foster carers receive training on safer caring practices and safeguarding. The agency works with a number of local authorities in accordance with working together to safeguarding children and follow the child protection procedure when safeguarding concerns arise. The fostering agency has a good relationship with the local safeguarding children's board and seeks advice if the need arises. Foster carers receive guidance and training for e-safety issues and protect young people from cyber bullying.

The fostering agency has a procedure for children missing from care and there are guidelines in place to follow this when a child goes missing from the placement. No foster children have been recorded missing and any unauthorised absences are reported to the agency by the carers. The out-of-hours support service provides advice to foster carers in reporting incidents of children who are deemed to be missing from care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children and young people enjoy sound relationships in their placements. The fostering agency provides training and support for foster carers on behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. The agency employs a clinical psychologist who discusses individual children's behavioural issues with social workers and supports foster carers to develop strategies to manage these. Foster carers provide an environment and culture that supports positive behaviour and they effectively manage challenging behaviour in a calm and professional manner.

The agency promotes education for children and young people. Children and young people have personal education plans. This gives foster carers a clear understanding of the local authority's educational aspirations for the children. Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities and liaise with schools. Foster carers encourage and support children and young people to attend schools and help them with homework. Children and young people are provided with computers by their placing authorities for educational and recreational purposes. A number of young people have sat GCSE examinations or equivalent. However, the fostering agency does not provide any specific additional education services as they do not employ a designated person to take a lead on education or to offer advice to the fostering panel.

Children and young people take part in various activities and pursue their interests and hobbies. Foster carers encourage and support children and young people to attend after school activities. Children and young people have opportunities to play various games in the gardens of the carers. Age appropriate toys and play equipment are provided to children. Foster carers support young people to access sporting activities in the local community. For example, a young person was supported to join a cricket academy and he plays village cricket with a foster carer.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for consulting children and young people and others involved. The fostering agency provides support to children and young people to complete the looked after children consultation form for the statutory foster care reviews and they are invited to attend fostering panel meetings should they wish to. Supervising social workers have regular liaison with the child's social worker to ensure that the children's views are ascertained and recorded. In addition to this, the fostering agency has its own age appropriate quality assurance questionnaires which are sent regularly to children and young people to ascertain their wishes and views.

Children and young people receive individualised and personalised care. Young people are provided with individual bedrooms which promotes their privacy and they are able to personalise their own space. Foster carers support children and young people in promoting their social and emotional development.

Contact is well promoted for looked after children and young people. The agency ensures that children and young people are encouraged to maintain and develop contacts and friendships as set out in their placement plans. Some of foster carers have good relationships with children's birth parents and some contacts take place in foster carers' homes and others in various contact centres.

There is a clear policy in place to welcome children and young people into foster carers' homes and when they leave this is done in a planned and sensitive manner. The planned admissions to foster carers are well organised and children are introduced to the placements gradually. Young people spoken to and feedback received by Ofsted state that they feel loved and valued by the foster carers and their family members.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering agency provides guidance and support to foster carers to enable them to provide support and guidance to young people preparing to move into independent living. Allowances and expenses are paid to foster carers to enable them to support children and young people to achieve good outcomes. Foster carers work closely with the leaving care teams in developing pathway plans for young people. Foster carers support young people to open savings bank accounts and encourage them to save money into the accounts.

Young people have opportunities to develop various skills during their stays at foster carers' homes. Foster carers encourage and support young people to look after their personal space, choose and buy their own clothes, get involved in house shopping and to travel independently into the local community. The fostering agency supports young people financially at the commencement of their independent living. For example, they purchase carpets and electric goods for their new accommodation.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The general organisation around working practices is good and Archway Care is functioning well. The fostering agency has a clear management and staffing structure that ensures there are clear lines of accountability throughout. Staff receive regular supervision and ongoing support from the Registered Manager and the senior practitioner who are available on a formal and informal basis. Caseloads are monitored and the agency currently employs eight qualified social workers and a family placement officer. The fostering team and the panel are well supported by an administrative team of three members.

The fostering agency has developed its Statement of Purpose which states the aims and objectives of the service. The agency has also developed a children and young

people's guide that is in a child-friendly format; the agency has had this guide translated into Pashto language. However, the children and young people's guide does not include the new address and telephone number of Ofsted should any one wish to contact Ofsted directly.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Children and young people receive an individualised service which is designed to meet their personal needs. Fostering service staff and carers have a good understanding of children's dietary, religious, social and cultural needs. Staff support young people to make personal choices and to access community resources.

The agency steadily recruits foster carers through various methods of recruitment drives; these include advertising, holding information events and via word of mouth. The agency carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers. These cover all areas of the competencies needed to establish if an individual is suitable to become a foster carer. Foster carers understand the reasons behind the statutory checks and the depth of the assessment. Foster carers appreciate that this process helps them to reflect on their past experiences and how these may impact on them caring for a looked after child.

Good systems are in place for working with and supporting foster carers. They are given a comprehensive foster carer's handbook that they find helpful as a reference guide; they also have access to regular support groups. Foster carers receive annual reviews and reports are prepared and presented to the fostering panel as required. The agency provides 24-hour support for foster carers and foster carers feel they can approach the agency any time they have a query or concern. Foster carers receive regular visits from their supervising social workers and written records of these visits are maintained so that any issues can be followed up.

Any complaints or allegations made are dealt with promptly and sensitively to ensure that an appropriate outcome is reached to safeguard children and young people in placement as well as supporting foster carers.

There is an ongoing training programme in place for foster carers that helps to ensure they are adequately equipped to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. Foster carers take part in pre-approval training that informs them about what the fostering task entails and helps them explore their opinions and attitudes. Training needs are identified during monthly visits to foster carers and discussed during the annual review process.

Children and young people are carefully matched to foster carers so that their needs can be met and this helps to prevent placements breaking down. Where there are gaps in the matching process, as a result of a shortage of more suitable foster carers, the agency supports foster carers to ascertain information and take action to address these gaps. A number of asylum seeking children are placed with foster carers. Some foster carers suggested that they would benefit from access to a designated person who has knowledge and experience in this particular field. The

Registered Manager said that they are looking into this matter.

The fostering panel is well managed and effective and its members understand the needs of children and young people. Foster carers and social work staff understand the function of the panel and panel members attend regular workshops to ensure that they can effectively fulfil their role. Detailed minutes are kept for the panel meetings held. There are clear procedures in place for the panel and the panel fulfils its quality assurance function, thus ensuring a high standard of assessment is maintained.

A detailed secure record is maintained of each child and young person's life while living with the agency's foster carers. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding record keeping. Foster carers demonstrate how they are recording memories as a part of life story work for children and young people; this includes taking photographs and keeping souvenirs from trips and activities.

Robust administration systems are in place for the maintenance of all records. Sufficient administrative support systems are in place and the agency has ample computer equipment to meet the agency's needs. All records are kept securely and generally maintained to a high standard. The agency ensures that the register of foster carers is always kept up to date.

Each foster carer has a named supervising social worker. Each carer has a foster care agreement in place and has membership of the Fostering Network. Records of activities, incidents, achievements, allegations and abuse and procedures for termination of approval are in place.

The fostering agency has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling to ensure the quality of service is maintained. This achieved by having clear lines of communication, sound financial standing and robust financial procedures and an agreed charge for fostering services. The Registered Manager advised the inspector that the fostering agency is financially viable.

The agency has developed a new tracking system which helps to ensure that statutory reviews are held within time. Other monitoring systems are in place to ensure that statutory checks, such as those with the Criminal Record Bureau, medicals, local authority checks and health and safety checks are also completed.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
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3 (2011)	include Ofsted address and correct telephone number of Ofsted in the children and young people's guide. (Regulation 3)	31/07/2011
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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):

- ensure that the fostering service obtains children and young people's up-to-date health assessments and these are available for inspection (NMS 6)
- consider recruiting a designated educational professional for providing specific educational services to the fostering agency (NMS 8)
- consider better ways to support foster carers where asylum seeking children and young people are placed. (NMS 24)