

Rainbow Fostering Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC031621
Inspection date	17/08/2012
Inspector	Jim Palmer
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Rainbow Fostering Services, Unit 10, Churchill Court, 58 Station Road, North Harrow, HARROW, Middlesex, HA2 7SA
Telephone number	020 8427 3355
Email	anneke@rainbowfostering.co.uk
Registered person	Rainbow Fostering Services Ltd
Registered manager	Anneke Cornelia Wright
Responsible individual	Aijaz Ahmad
Date of last inspection	11/02/2008

© 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

Rainbow Fostering Service Ltd is a privately owned independent fostering agency established in 1998 by the present managing director who is the responsible individual for the service. The agency provides a very diverse range of carers across the London area with a smaller group of carers in Hampshire.

The agency's main objective is to provide a service to children and young people who are in need of foster care. The service on offer includes long, short term, emergency and planned placements. It also provides mother and baby placements.

The service provides 126 registered placements with 44 foster carers and is currently looking after 75 children and young people.

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 **good**.

The service is well led and managed. Senior managers have a very good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. There are action plans in place to continually improve the quality of service and outcomes for children. Leadership is dynamic and there is a very strong ethos of child-focused practice. Carers, staff and managers are passionate about how best they can meet children's needs.

The quality of relationships between carers, children, supervising social workers and managers is a strength of the service. Children are able to confirm how they have benefited from their placement and the depth of relationship between them and their carers.

The service provides a diverse range of carers who are able to meet a wide range of needs of children placed. Feedback from placing social workers is positive. Where sufficient information is available to carers the matching process is very good; there are some excellent examples of good matching. However, despite the efforts of the agency, this information is not available in every case at the time of placements

being made.

There are good monitoring systems in place for ensuring compliance with regulations and national minimum standards, which are improving. Outcome monitoring records show that children are making good progress in placements; some children are making exceptional progress.

The agency seeks the views of children and other stakeholders and many new initiatives aimed at engaging children and carers in the development of the service are in place. Not all have had time to consolidate and measure their effectiveness, hence the overall judgement of good. Practice is good across all outcome groups, and in some areas is outstanding.

Areas for further development include: using the views and wishes of children and their families in further developing the service; ensuring that children know how to access an advocate; ensuring that all entries in the records are accurate, for example the number of unannounced visits to foster carers in a year; and ensuring that a copy of a report on the quality of care is sent to Ofsted at regular intervals. These shortfalls do not directly impact on children and young people's welfare or safety.

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
35 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review of the quality of care at appropriate intervals. (Regulation 35(2))	30/09/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children have access to independent advice, specifically that children know how to access an advocate (NMS 1.5)
- ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring and developing the service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that the quality of recordings are regularly monitored; specifically that the frequency of unannounced visits to foster carers is accurately recorded. (NMS 26.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people say they are fully involved in the planning for their future lives and confirm that they are always given an explanation if their wishes and views cannot be met. The agency has good systems in place for consulting with young people, through consultation events, activities aimed at seeking the views of children, feedback questionnaires and at carers' annual reviews and children's placement reviews. However, the agency is still developing systems for consulting with children's families and fully engaging children in developing the service. Some young people were involved in creating a DVD presentation on the fostering service and some young people are actively involved in creating a preparation for independence training programme for young people. Not all young people are clear about the impact that their views may have on the development and quality of the service.

Children benefit from being placed with carers who are able to meet their needs; the agency has a very diverse range of carers able to meet a very wide range of need. There are some excellent examples of detailed matching, and some planned placements have detailed introductions and specialist support provided to carers prior to the placement commencing. As a result, placement breakdowns are low and the agency always holds disruption meetings if placements do breakdown. Carers report that they are provided with excellent support, and where necessary training, to help them meet children's sometimes highly complex needs. All permanent placements are agreed at the fostering approval panel; this helps to ensure that children's needs are met.

Young people confirm they are happy in their placements. There are some very strong testimonies by young people about how they value the relationships with their carers and how they have benefited from those placements. Young people describe how foster carers advocate on their behalf, with school and college, placing authorities and in a wide range of areas in their lives. All young people spoken with say their foster carers are committed to supporting young people in achieving the best possible outcomes. Young people say they are treated as all other members of the household. Comments from young people included the following statements: 'I have never felt so welcome and cared for in my life', and, 'Thank you for providing me the opportunities to harness my own abilities.'

Children and young people are encouraged and supported in engaging in a wide range of social and leisure activities designed to promote self-confidence and self-esteem. Children's achievements are recognised in award ceremonies and events such as an art competition. Children and young people are proud to see their art work displayed on the office walls when they visit the office. Young people are also able to nominate their carers for awards in an annual award ceremony for carers.

All young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. They confirm that

they are able to have choice about which doctor they are registered with. Where possible some young people express a wish to remain registered with their previous doctor. All say they are happy with the arrangements and that they are able to access a full range of medical services to meet their needs. As young people grow older they are encouraged to take greater personal responsibility for organising and arranging their own health appointments. Foster carers are very aware of the importance of promoting good health outcomes, and provide advice and guidance to young people in a range of areas including diet, healthy lifestyles, substance misuse and sexual health. Carers liaise closely with appropriate health professionals, including psychological services. Psychotherapeutic support is also available to children and carers. There are good links with healthcare professionals and these are being strengthened at a more strategic level within the agency.

Children and young people benefit from living with carers who promote good educational outcomes for children. Most children are doing well or very well in school. Significant progress has been made by some children, and in some cases school attendance and achievement has exceeded expectation. Some children with a long-term history of attendance difficulties have achieved 100% attendance records since living with Rainbow foster carers. Foster carers liaise closely with schools if there are any difficulties. Young people describe how their foster carers have supported them in school and helped to resolve any difficulties, such as bullying. All young people have personal education plans in place which are regularly reviewed.

Foster carers are very aware of the importance of contact between children and their families. Carers regularly facilitate and on occasions will supervise contact arrangements.

Older young people are supported by carers in developing greater life skills leading toward independence. Young people say they are encouraged to keep their bedrooms clean and tidy and carry out day-to-day household tasks. They feel this is introduced in an age-appropriate manner. The agency has recently introduced an independence training programme for young people. Young people contributed to the design and delivery of the course. All young people over the age of 16 have pathway or transition plans in place.

Quality of service

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

The agency recruits carers with a wide range of skills and experience that reflect the wide diversity of the local community and the range of needs that reflect the placement requests the agency receives. Foster carers are also provided with additional specialist support packages and training in order to enable them to be well matched with children and increase their ability to meet their needs. The service monitors placement outcomes and the recruitment team liaise closely with the placement referral duty worker in order to identify any shortfalls in service provision. This informs recruitment strategy. For example, currently the agency has identified a need to recruit more single male carers.

Young people are carefully matched to suitable carers; this process is strengthened by the introduction of a new matching tracking tool introduced earlier this year. However, this process is sometimes hampered by a lack of information from placing authorities, particularly in relation to emergency placement referrals. Foster carers report that they always receive all pre-placement information held by the agency and any missing information is requested speedily from the placing authority. Children and young people's needs are assessed very thoroughly. All young people have placement plans and these are regularly reviewed. Specialist advice and guidance are available to foster carers looking after children with complex needs.

There is a rigorous training and assessment process for prospective foster carers. Most assessments are completed and presented to the fostering panel within eight months. The assessment of carers is undertaken by sessional social work staff, whose work is supervised by managers and subjected to a quality assurance process prior to presentation at panel. Samples of assessment documents show the assessments to be thorough, competency based and supported with good evidence. All registered foster carers have very good quality regular supervision with their allocated supervising social worker. Records of supervision meetings are well recorded and all foster carers receive their annual review within appropriate timescales and a minimum of one unannounced visit each year. All have completed the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards programme, and many have National Vocational Qualifications at levels 4 and 5. The post approval training programme is impressive and very comprehensive. This is highly valued by foster carers and is a strength of the service.

The fostering panel is appropriately constituted and the chair of panel is suitably experienced and knowledgeable about the role of panel. Panel minutes indicate that the panel is rigorous and provides a quality assurance function for the agency. It will defer making recommendations to the agency decision maker if information is unclear or missing. All panel members receive annual training on the legislative framework and the role of panel. Panel members all receive an annual performance appraisal. Foster carers report the panel process is thorough and detailed in its examination of each referral, but professional in the manner in which questions are voiced with prospective foster carers. The agency is recruiting new panel members to the central list in order to widen the range of panel members available.

Foster carers are very strong in saying they are valued members of the team looking after young people. They say that their opinions are always sought and are respected, even though not always agreed with. They are very clear about the levels of delegated authority. Relationships between foster carers and the agency are very good. Carers feel very well supported and valued. The agency has excellent retention and recognition opportunities for carers. This is another strength of the service and helps to develop carers who are energetic and passionate about promoting the needs of children they look after.

Foster carers have a good understanding of the need to promote children's rights and gave examples of how they advocate on behalf of the children they look after,

for example, with schools and on occasions with placing authorities. All young people have an information pack which includes information on how to raise a concern or complaint and how to contact independent organisations such as the Children's Rights Director. Despite this information being provided to young people, not all are aware how they could access a children's advocacy service.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The safety and welfare of children are promoted by safeguarding policies and procedures which are known and understood by carers and staff. These policies were developed in consultation with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. All staff and carers receive regular training in safeguarding awareness and are confident that they know how to respond if they have any concerns about children's safety. Children and young people feel safe in their foster placements. They say that foster carers keep them safe and any concerns that they may have at home or in school, such as bullying are followed up by their carers. Young people are given advice on how to keep themselves safe when online or using mobile telephones.

The safety of young people who are absent from home without authority or who are missing is promoted by the use of risks assessments and a local protocol between the agency, the police and placing authorities. All foster carers are familiar with the distinction between the two. There are relatively high numbers of children who absent themselves from home. However, the agency has a strategy in place to reduce those numbers and there is a small reduction in the most recent monitoring figures.

There have been three incidents where safeguarding allegations have been made. Each of these was appropriately responded to and referred to local authorities. Liaison with Local Authority Designated Officers is good. Regular liaison takes place when safeguarding concerns arise.

The agency has robust systems in place for recruiting staff and carers and no staff start work until all checks are satisfactorily completed. Carers are not presented to the fostering panel until all their checks are complete. All staff records hold a statement confirming that there are no gaps in employment history; however, in one case the employment history was identified by year only. This error was immediately rectified by a new staff application form being designed and a reminder issued to all staff.

Children and young people's safety is promoted through the recruitment and assessment process. Supervision of carers has a safeguarding focus and foster carers are very aware of their responsibilities in terms of keeping children safe. All foster carers have safe care policies and individual risk assessments in place. They all receive a least one unannounced visit a year and have a regular health and safety checklist update. Foster carers are fully aware of those matters that they have to report to the agency and are aware of the impact of abuse on children, themselves

and all other members of the household and wider community. Any accidents or injuries to young people are appropriately recorded by carers and reported to the agency.

Children and young people and their carers are given advice on how to complain, and how to support children in making a complaint. Children and their carers confirm that they know how to raise a complaint and say that any concerns they have will be looked into fairly and thoroughly.

Leadership and management

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

Leadership and management in this service are very strong. Senior managers provide excellent leadership and are committed to driving up the quality of service provision and outcomes for children. Some aspects of the leadership are outstanding, with very strong monitoring systems in place. However, some of these monitoring systems are still being developed and as yet there has not been sufficient time to fully evaluate their effectiveness. Children's progress in placement is monitored regularly, and detailed reports are produced for children's placement reviews and for contract monitoring meetings. Managers and staff are very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and use the monitoring information effectively to take appropriate management action to address any patterns or trends that are identified. However, to date no report on any review of the quality of care has been made available to the Chief Inspector, as required.

Foster carers say that they very strongly feel they are part of the professional team looking after children. They said that their views were always respected and that they had an open dialogue between themselves and the agency. They did say that this mutual respect was not always replicated by the children's placing social workers. There are excellent systems for developing foster carers' range of skills and for recognising their achievements, for example, through annual award ceremonies and the opportunity to join an occupational pension scheme. Foster carers highly value the level of support and availability made to them of supervising social workers, the manager and the director. This is a real strength of the organisation. Foster carers report 'year on year' improvements to the service. The majority of foster carers are very happy with the service the agency provides for them.

Children's views are sought about how the service could be improved and developed, through questionnaires, consultation events, placement and carer reviews. However, not all young people are clear about how their views could help to develop the service. While consultation with young people is good, this is an area of further development.

Children benefit from the good links that exist between foster carers and their supervising social workers and other professional agencies. This contributes to improving outcomes for children, particularly in health, education and psychological and emotional support. However, work is continuing in order to strengthen and

further develop inter-professional partnerships at a strategic level.

The service has received two complaints during the last 12 months. These are well recorded and appropriately investigated. Feedback from placing authorities is positive about the open manner in which the agency resolves any concerns raised with them. Case files show that practice issues are raised when necessary in foster carer and staff supervision. The agency has a good record of learning from incidents, and views these as opportunities to take to team meetings to share any learning. All recommendations and requirements from the previous inspection have been implemented.

The agency employs sufficient suitably qualified and experienced staff to enable carers to meet the needs of children. Staff professional development is another strength of the agency. A number of staff commented about how strongly they are supported in their professional development. The agency has a culture of open learning and improving practice through sharing knowledge and experience, for example, in team meetings. All staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals.

The agency works closely with placing local authorities to monitor the outcomes for children placed and ensure that foster carers act within the local authority's plan for the care of the child. This ensures that good corporate parenting practice is embedded within the agency. The agency will, however, act in the interests of young people by challenging placing authorities should it be necessary.

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.