

# Sunbeam Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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**

Sunbeam Fostering is an independent fostering agency that has approximately 150 approved foster carers and can provide care and accommodation for up to approximately 350 children and young people. The agency's main offices are situated in Perivale on an industrial estate with some available parking. These offices contain areas where contact can take place, a training area and a meeting room, as well as open plan office space and smaller offices used by the management team. The agency also has other venues that are used for contact and the provision of support groups for foster carers and children and young people. The agency provides short to long term placements, respite, emergency, bridging, assessment and parent and child placements.

### **Summary**

This was a key announced inspection that looked at all the key National Minimum Standards. Economic well-being was not judged during this inspection as there are no key standards under this outcome heading. There have been no actions or recommendations made as a result of this inspection. Sunbeam fostering continues to provide an outstanding service. The continual improvements and developments made by the agency demonstrate the management's commitment to providing good quality foster care for looked after children. Foster carers are motivated and committed to meeting the needs of the children and young people in their care and demonstrate a good understanding of the difficulties faced by looked after children. The agency has sound administration, recording and monitoring systems in place and good staff support mechanisms. There are clear lines of accountability and the agency is open and transparent when dealing with local authorities and other external agencies.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The agency continually looks to develop and improve the service it provides for children and young people and the foster carers who provide their care. At the last inspection there was no required action needed to meet the National Minimum Standards and no good practice recommendations were made. However, the agency has developed and further improvements have been made over the last twelve months. For example, regular progress reports are written and provided to ensure that the welfare and progress of children and young people is constantly monitored. The agency has also improved the training programme and guidance for foster carers and staff. The agency has also revised the staff supervision system and developed closer working relationships with local authorities to improve joint working and achieve improved outcomes for children and young people.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency ensures that foster carers are fully informed about the health needs of children and young people at the earliest opportunity depending on the circumstances of the child or young person at the time of placement. This allows foster carers to take the appropriate action to support and encourage children and young people to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Each child and young person's placement plan contains details of their health needs and both the foster

carer and the agency maintain a detailed record of any health appointments or treatment received and the outcome of this. Foster carers are also supported to meet the specialist health needs of children and young people such as taking them to therapeutic services or physiotherapy. In some cases there have been very positive outcomes for children and young people as a result of this input. Foster carers receive written guidance in the Foster Carer's Handbook on health issues such as infection control, sexual health, drug and alcohol misuse, hearing, dental care, eye care, immunisations, growth and development and diet and exercise. Foster carers also receive training on a variety of health topics including first aid for babies and children, sex, relationship and teenage pregnancy issues, promoting emotional and mental health of children and young people, caring for disabled children, eating disorders and autism. The agency also provides information on health issues in their quarterly newsletters such as smoking and the effects on children and young people. All of this information provided enables foster carers to make informed decisions about meeting the health needs of children in conjunction with the agency and placing authority. Discussing health issues also forms part of supervision visits made to the foster carers home and their annual review to ensure that any identified issues are followed up and monitored.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Robust systems are in place for the recruitment of staff that include verification of references, renewal of Criminal Record Bureau checks at appropriate intervals and clear records are maintained and monitoring systems in place. The agency employs skilled staff and supports them to develop in areas where they have less experience. Qualified social workers carry out assessments of prospective foster carers and they are given training and supported to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete this task. Children and young people are placed with foster carers who have been thoroughly assessed and can provide a safe and comfortable environment for them. An annual health and safety assessment of foster carers homes as well as regular monitoring throughout the year ensures that any risk to the health and safety of children and young people is promptly identified and responded to. Written guidance on a wide range of health and safety issues such as safety gates, window locks, car safety, hazardous chemicals, poisons and pets ensures that foster carers are informed about how to keep their homes safe and respond to emergency situations. Children and young people are carefully matched to foster carers so that their needs can be met and to help 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. Information such as the location of places of worship, dietary information and cultural norms and customs are provided by the agency and in many cases foster carers use their initiative to access this information themselves. Foster carers are provided with clear guidance regarding safer caring issues and practical day to day situations to consider. Training is also provided on child protection issues that explores the damage that can be caused by previous significant harm and foster carers describe this training as 'powerful and thought provoking'. Foster carers are well informed and understand what forms of behaviour management are acceptable and clear written information is given in more than one format to reinforce that corporal punishment is not acceptable under any circumstances. Foster carers respond to behaviour in a constructive manner that supports children and young people to manage the difficulties they are facing and find alternative ways to express their feelings. The agency responds promptly and appropriately to allegations made about foster carers and works closely with local authorities to meet the needs of children and young people in placement.

Foster carers understand why children and young people may make allegations and are fully aware of the need to investigate all allegations that are made. Foster carers feel that they are well supported during the investigation of any allegations made and clear records are maintained of any action taken. Any identified incidents of bullying are appropriately reported on and dealt with by the agency and good systems are in place for when a child or young person is missing from home. The fostering panel is well managed and effective and its members understand the needs of children and young people. The panel consists of individuals with a wide range of knowledge and experience that includes children's health, education, a foster carer and an ex care leaver. There are clear procedures in place for the panel and the panel fulfils its quality assurance function ensuring a high standard of assessment is maintained at all times. Foster carers and social work staff understand the function of the panel and feel that constructive comments are made by panel members.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency strives to recruit foster carers from a wide range of differing backgrounds to meet the diverse needs of looked after children and young people. Foster carers are provided with training on valuing diversity. The Foster Carer's Handbook also contains practical ideas for foster carers on encouraging cultural identity such as finding out about dietary rules, cultural customs, appropriate toys and books and getting involved with others who reflect the identity of the child or young person being cared for. Foster carers encourage children and young people to have new experiences and try new activities encouraging a sense of achievement and self worth. Guidance is provided to foster carers on all aspects of educational development. Educational needs are included as part of children and young people's placement plans and progress is monitored during supervising social worker visits and during placement reviews. Foster carers are clear about the expectations with regard to meeting the educational needs of the children and young people in their care. Young people say that their foster carers help them with their homework, and quiet space for study is provided in foster carers homes. The agency celebrates the achievements of children and young people and a section of the quarterly newsletter is dedicated to this. The agency therefore encourages children and young people to value education and rewards achievement. The agency provides a short breaks service and paid respite for foster carers depending on how long they have been fostering for the agency. This allows foster carers to have a break from challenging placements and prevent placement breakdown for children and young people.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has excellent facilities that promote and facilitate contact. For example, the agency provides comfortable, inviting venues with toys and colourful decoration for supervised contact to take place and provides staff to support supervised contact. Foster carers are supported to help children and young people maintain relationships with their families and understand the importance of this. The agency prepares foster carers for the difficulties that may be faced when trying to maintain relationships between children and young people and their families. This includes observation and monitoring changes in behaviour of children and young people and responding to difficult situations with birth parents. The agency strives to ensure that children and young people and foster carers are listened to and have the opportunity to express their views and contribute ideas to the running of the agency. The agency also has various

ways in which it keeps children, young people and foster carers informed of any changes. Children's support groups take place and involve activity based sessions that encourage children and young people to open up and talk in an informal setting. Bi-annual surveys in a colourful child friendly format are also sent out to children and young people and a questionnaire is also completed as part of the review process. Children say that they feel listened to and comfortable approaching their foster carers about anything they are worried about. The agency is planning to set up a leaving care support group for young people as an addition to the support and consultation already in place.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

There is a very clear statement of the aims and objectives of the agency and the practice of the management and staff of the agency reflects the Statement of Purpose. This document is regularly updated to reflect any changes in the operation of the agency. The agency has an informative Children's Guide that is in a child friendly format and produced in a variety of different languages including Punjabi, Hindi, French, Urdu, Albanian and Bengali. The guide includes information in a question and answer format and allows children and young people to enter personal details. It also contains clear contact information for external advocacy agencies and information about making a complaint. There is also a feedback form at the back of the guide for children and young people to share their views of the guide. The agency has a clear management and staffing structure that ensures there are clear lines of accountability throughout the agency. Staff receive support from qualified and experienced managers who are available on a formal and informal basis to discuss all aspects of their role and their workload. There are excellent systems in place to monitor workloads and ensure that there are sufficient staff to meet the needs of the agency. Good monitoring systems are also in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews are managed effectively. Good administrative support systems are in place and the agency has ample computer equipment to meet the agency's needs. The agency has had a variety of staff changes over the last twelve months including changes in the management structure. The agency has coped well with these changes and acknowledged and responded promptly when changes have not produced the expected results. Despite these changes the agency maintains a stable, committed and motivated staff group in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the agency and produces a high standard of care for children and young people. The agency steadily recruits foster carers through advertising and word of mouth at a pace that ensures standards are maintained. The agency has introduced an incentive scheme for foster carers with a payment of £200 being paid to foster carers who introduce someone to fostering. The agency carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers that cover all areas of competency needed to ascertain if an individual is suitable to become a foster carer. Foster carers understand the reasons behind the depth of the assessment and appreciate that this process helps them to reflect on their past experiences and how this may impact on them caring for a looked after child. Clear 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 and 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. Supervising social workers also discuss individual cases in their professional supervision and records of these discussions are maintained so that clear information is available about what action needs to be taken. The management of the agency have built good links with placing authorities meeting regularly to ensure that the best possible outcomes are reached for children and young people placed with the agency's foster carers. Any complaints or allegations made are dealt with promptly and sensitively to ensure that the appropriate outcome is reached to safeguard children and young people in placement and support foster carers. There is a comprehensive ongoing training programme in place for foster carers that helps ensure they are adequately equipped to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. Foster carers take part in three days pre-approval training that informs them about what the fostering task entails and explores their views and attitudes. Foster carers felt that this training had a powerful impact and made them think about the responsibility they would be taking on caring for looked after children and young people. Further training is provided on a wide range of topics including record keeping, complaints and allegations, managing challenging behaviour, first aid for babies and children, understanding attachment and childcare law and court proceedings. Foster carers are expected to attend three training days per year and staff are encouraged to take part in training with foster carers especially new staff. Training needs are identified during monthly visits to foster carers and discussed during the annual review process. Staff and foster carers have also been supported to complete National Vocational Qualifications. A detailed secure record is maintained of each child and young persons life whilst living with the agency's foster carers. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding keeping records and can demonstrate how they are recording memories as a part of life story work for children and young people, for example, taking photographs and keeping souvenirs from trips and activities. Robust administration systems are in place for the maintenance of all records. All records are kept securely and maintained to a high standard. Regular audits of records and recording systems take place to ensure that records are kept up to date and in order.

## 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
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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):

## 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.**