

# Swan Fostering Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Rosemary Dancer
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	5 July 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**

Swan Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency which was established in May 2005. The agency provides fostering placements for children and young people within the birth to eighteen years age range.

### **Summary**

The agency shows a strong commitment to achieving good outcomes for children. Applicants go through a formal preparation, assessment and approval process which prepares them well for the foster care role. Children's needs are well met by their carers who are in turn well supported by the agency. The services in relation to support to foster placements, especially in supporting and promoting children's educational achievements, are of an outstanding quality. The agency is well managed. There is a strong commitment to ensuring staff are well supported in carrying out their respective roles and there are clear lines of accountability. Communication across the agency and with other agencies and professionals is good. Where shortfalls are identified they are addressed promptly and where lessons need to be learnt they are. The agency demonstrates a child-centred approach is taken to its work at a strategic and operational level and that good outcomes for children are being achieved.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

There were five actions and one recommendation made at the last inspection and all of these have been addressed.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensures that children's health is promoted. The fostering service is aware of the specialist services available in the areas in which their carers are located and good links have been developed with children's placing authorities and local health services. These links ensure that young people's health needs are met in a timely way. A proactive approach is taken by the agency to ensure that all relevant consents and health information is provided to carers, in writing, in a timely way. The agency and its carers ensure that health plans are updated during the placement and that this information is used as a part of the planning and review for the child. Carers are given training on health issues and are very proactive in exercising their responsibility to help to promote the health of children placed with them. Foster carers promote children's participation in and access to healthy leisure activities such as swimming. Carers have a good awareness about healthy eating and children are provided with varied and healthy diets. Children are also well supported in developing self-care skills.

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

The provision is good.

The staff and panel member recruitment processes in place are robust and overall follow good practice in safeguarding children. However, not all personnel files evidence the qualifications people hold or that references have been verified. The managers of the agency and staff are

appropriately qualified and experienced in working with children within the care system and staff, foster carers and other professionals expressed a high level of confidence in the management arrangements. Children are overall provided with comfortable, safe and nurturing environments and are placed with carers who have been through a comprehensive preparation and assessment process. However, some assessment reports do not evidence that a full analysis of information gathered has taken place and some do not evidence that gaps in employment have been fully explored. Supervision of foster carers covers health and safety issues and safeguarding matters and periodically an unannounced visit is made to each home. The health and safety assessment does not include an assessment of poisonous plants, dangerous weapons or hanging cords such as those on window blinds. Foster carers' own children are included in the assessment process and their views and needs are considered initially and throughout the foster carer career. Placements are underpinned by clear foster carer and placement agreements. The agency is very proactive at ensuring the placing agency has provided sufficient written information about the child's needs. For planned placements, although the main responsibility remains with the placing authority, Swan has thoughtful matching and introduction processes in place which ensure that all of a child's needs can be met. Generally a good awareness about carers' strengths and areas for development informs the matching processes and means support can be provided to meet any areas of shortfall. Children are well supported in keeping safe by carers who have a high level of awareness about the vulnerability of 'looked after children'. Safe caring plans are developed within each household and are reviewed when a new child joins the family. For each child a risk assessment is carried out and an individual safe caring plan is developed. Children report that they feel safe and well cared for in their respective placements and they all say they have someone to speak to if they had a problem and all knew how to make a complaint. Carers are provided with good training in health matters, for example in relation to safeguarding matters, first aid and food hygiene. An annual review is undertaken in respect of each household and an update of the health and safety check of each household is a part of the review process. The fostering panel has written procedures in place but these do not provide guidance for the panel about the decision-making process when all members are not in agreement. The panel is properly constituted, has access to medical, educational and legal advice where required and is chaired by a suitably qualified and experienced independent chair. The chair, in conjunction with the agency, is developing further the panel's quality assurance functions. There is a good quality training programme in place for panel members and the induction process for new panel members is being formalised. The administration of the panel is efficient and effective and the minutes of the proceedings are of a very good quality. The minutes clearly state the recommendations made, the reasons why a particular recommendation has been made and they identify the applicants' strengths and areas for development. The decision making in respect to applicants' suitability is undertaken by an external individual.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has had good success in recruiting carers from a range of backgrounds and this has meant that children are provided with services which value diversity and promote equality. Children are appropriately matched with carers and a range of support is provided to placements to ensure that all of a child's needs can be fully met. The agency and the carers are very proactive in ensuring children have opportunities to pursue talents, interests and hobbies and ensure that there are opportunities for children to develop new interests. A very high priority is given to meeting the educational needs of the children placed. Carers are fully involved in all aspects

of a child's school life and attend all relevant meetings such as parents' evenings, open days and educational planning for the child. The carers and the agency work hard to support children who have difficulties within school. Funding and support is available to children to access a range of outreach services which are especially beneficial for children who are not in school or are only in school part-time. The agency has developed excellent links and working relationships with the local authority educational advisers. These advisers commend the work the agency carries out in supporting children and young people to reach their full potential.

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

The provision is good.

The agency and carers show a strong commitment to promoting contact between children, their birth families and other people significant in their lives. Some complex contact arrangements have been supported sensitively despite considerable disruption being caused to carers. Contact arrangements are agreed and communicated to all of those involved. Records are made by carers about the quality of contact and of any issues arising so that this information can be fed into the care planning process. The agency premises are used to facilitate contact between children and their parents or to facilitate reviews of children's care plans. In these circumstances parents are well supported by Swan staff to participate in the contact session or review as fully as they are able. The agency is proactive in seeking the views of children and where appropriate their parents. Children who expressed a view feel that they are listened to and that their views are taken into account. Children are also consulted about the care planning process via the local authority review system. The agency and carers are fully involved in supporting children through the review and will advocate for them when necessary.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The work of the agency is underpinned by a clear Statement of Purpose and supported by a range of policies and procedures. Written information is provided to children about being fostered which can be used by carers when talking with children about foster care. All information can be provided in a range of languages and different formats. All written information is subject to regular review and is updated in line with national and local developments. The agency is managed effectively and efficiently by people with appropriate skills and experience. The manager of the agency has not got a management qualification but has commenced study for a NVQ 4 in management. The provider of the agency takes a 'hands on' approach to management issues and retains overall control of the management of the agency. There are procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the work of the service and as a new agency some aspects of quality assurance have just started to be tested. Staff and carers are clear about their roles. Lines of accountability and communication between the staff, foster carers and other agencies is good. There are proper financial procedures in place and clear information is provided to purchasers of the services. Staff and carers confirm that they are well organised, managed and supported by an open and inclusive management team. There are good arrangements in place in respect to clerical and administrative support and enquirers and foster carers are well received when making contact with the agency. As the service expands new members of staff are employed to ensure that there are sufficient staff to carry on the work. Professional supervision

is provided to all foster carers and staff members who confirmed this to be of a good quality and undertaken on a regular basis. Carers and staff also report good access to training opportunities with a significant number of the agency's carers about to commence a NVQ qualification. Take up of some of the training provided by foster carers is patchy; the manager is aware of this and taking steps to address it. Appropriate case records are maintained for foster carers and children. Information about children is shared with placing authorities and carers support the child in gaining an understanding about his situation. There are appropriate records made and maintained in respect to the running of the service and due attention is paid to the confidentiality and safe storage of records. The premises the service operates from are family-friendly, secure, well equipped and there are efficient administrative systems in place. There are systems in place to monitor the financial viability of the business and proper internal and external accounting systems are in place.

## 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):

- ensure that all assessments are clear, concise and analytical (National Minimum Standard 6)
- expand the foster carer health and safety checklist to include an assessment of poisonous plants, dangerous weapons and hanging cords such as those on window blinds and ensure that each applicant's work history includes the start and finish months of the period of employment (National Minimum Standard 6)
- provide guidance for social workers about what to do when ex-partners cannot be contacted (National Minimum Standard 6)
- evidence that the authenticity of references in respect to staff and panel members has taken place and ensure that evidence is retained on files in respect to qualifications held (National Minimum Standard 15)
- develop procedures which detail what happens when panel members cannot reach a consensus (National Minimum Standard 30)
- reconsider the arrangements for decision making (National Minimum Standard 30)
- ensure the manager completes her management qualification in a timely way (National Minimum Standard 2)

## 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.**