

# Rainbow Fostering Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Inspection date** 26/01/2016  
**Inspector** Lee Kirwin  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype** Independent Fostering Agency

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**Setting address** Rainbow Fostering Services, Unit 10, Churchill Court, 58 Station Road,  
North Harrow, HARROW, Middlesex, HA2 7SA

**Telephone number** 020 8427 3355  
**Email** [aijaz@rainbowfostering.co.uk](mailto:aijaz@rainbowfostering.co.uk)  
**Registered person** Rainbow Fostering Services Ltd  
**Registered manager** Vacant  
**Responsible individual** Mrs Afshan Ahmad  
**Date of last inspection** 17/08/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Rainbow Fostering Service Ltd is a privately owned independent fostering agency established in 1998. 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 services on offer includes long, short term, emergency and planned placements. It also provides parent and child placements. As of March 2015, the service has 67 fostering households, with 108 approved carers, offering 122 fostering places with 81 children and young people in placement.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

**Good:** An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

**Requires improvement:** An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

**Inadequate:** An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

## Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency provides good quality of care for young people. They settle quickly and carers make them feel welcome and include them in all areas of family life. Young people feel part of the family and enjoy the security and stability that this brings.

Young people do well in education and have high aspirations for the future. They enjoy a range of activities and hobbies and they often go away on holiday with their carers. Young people receive support to keep in contact with their own families when this is possible.

The agency have carers from a diverse range of cultures and this means that children can usually be placed with carers who have direct experience of their cultural needs, their faith and often have the language skills to communicate with

young people who speak other languages. When it is not possible to place young people with a family of a similar cultural background, carers make adjustments to ensure that cultural needs are met and that children can, if they wish, follow their chosen faith.

The agency provides excellent training and support for foster carers. This ensures that they never feel that they are alone when managing complex issues and they have the skills and experience to meet the needs of the young people they look after.

The fostering panel is effective in its role to make sure that foster carers are approved only if they are suitable for the role. They let the agency know if the quality of information and assessments are of insufficient quality to make informed recommendations. The agency uses feedback from young people, supervising social workers and placing authority staff to inform annual reviews and identify learning and development areas for foster carers.

Supervising social workers are experienced and competent professionals. They receive good support and training to support their role and they work effectively in partnership with placing authority professionals. This ensures that young people are looked after in a way that is consistent with their relevant care plans.

Young people are generally well behaved and most do not go missing from care or are absent without permission. Foster carers are resilient and will frequently stick with young people through crisis and manage challenging behaviour effectively. They are proactive when young people are missing and take steps in partnership with other agencies, to ensure they are located and return home safely. Despite good examples of carers helping young people to reduce the amount of times they go missing, the agency does not always have all of the information it needs to make sure that partner agencies understand the vulnerabilities of each young person and where they may be in the event that they are missing. This presents a risk that the most vulnerable young people do not receive a robust, multi-agency approach to keep them safe when they are missing and potentially at risk of exploitation.

The registered manager's post is currently vacant but the former responsible individual is in the process of applying for this role and is covering these duties as an interim arrangement. He is an experienced, qualified social worker, with many years' experience of working in a fostering setting. He has good oversight of the quality of care provided by the agency and is both accessible and visible to carers, young people and agency staff. He does not have formal supervision or undergo annual appraisals and this runs the risk that he does not have the opportunity to reflect on his practice and or undertake continual professional development to ensure he remains effective in the manager's role.

## Areas of 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.

Requirement	Due date
With particular reference to making sure that there is a risk assessment and safety plan in place to address the vulnerabilities of each child. The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that— the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11(a))	15.03.2016

### Recommendations:

The care and support provided to children, minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing. (NMS 5.1)

If a child is absent from the fostering home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child is missing), the fostering service’s procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where each foster home is located. (NMS 5.6)

Suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency’s registered person or manager of a local authority fostering service. (NMS 24.3)

## Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people and parents placed with children enjoy living in their foster families. One young person described his foster carer as "fantastic" and described his experience as feeling part of a real family. A parent who is placed with a child said she felt stable for the first time in her life. She was particularly pleased with how well she was made to feel welcome when she first arrived and how feeling secure helped her have adult conversations and talk about how she felt.

Nearly all young people achieve good outcomes in education and many get extra support to help with their learning. They are encouraged to stretch themselves and to aim high and this helps young people make progress and develop a positive attitude to learning. Where young people struggle to engage in learning, foster carers work hard to build secure, caring attachments. This helps young people develop a sense of self-worth and this helps them become less fearful of failure and gives them the confidence to try harder. The agency holds an annual awards ceremony for carers and young people. They enjoy this and get to celebrate their personal achievements, no matter how large or small.

Foster carers go out of their way to help young people stay in touch with their birth families. They develop positive relationships with parents and make the young people's family members feel welcome if they visit the foster home. This means that foster carers and parents can often work effectively in partnership to help young people thrive while living away from home.

Young people play a part in day-to-day family life and get involved in cooking meals and keeping the home tidy. They are supported to take risks safely, in order to develop independent skills and this helps them make positive friendships in the community and spend constructive time with their peers. They often maintain positive contact with carers after they leave the foster family and sometimes, when it is in their interests, they stay well into adulthood.

Young people are generally well behaved. Foster carers offer nurturing and encourage clear boundaries and healthy routines in the same way a 'good parent' would. They have high expectations in terms of how young people treat others and encourage positive behaviour with an understanding of each child's needs and journey into care. This allows young people to make mistakes and learn from them without feeling unloved or rejected when they get things wrong.

The agency has a diverse range of carers and can often make very good matches to ensure young people are placed with families of a similar cultural background. When this is not possible, foster carers are knowledgeable and accepting of different cultures and they make adjustments; providing support to meet the needs of all young people.

Young people are healthy and foster carers make sure they attend all of their health

appointments. They receive specialist training when this is required to look after young people with more complex health needs. One parent in placement appreciated the support she received from the carer to help her understand advice from medical staff. Another carer worked so hard with health services and a young person, that he made more progress than health specialists thought possible. This outcome significantly improved the life chances and quality of life for this child.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has a diverse range of skilled and experienced foster carers. This means they can usually find a good match to meet the needs of young people referred by placing authorities. Commissioners and placement officers from local authorities appreciate the fact that the agency shows a high level of professionalism when managing new referrals. They only place children if it is clear that the foster carer can meet their needs. One local authority manager commented that the agency 'can nearly always help with referrals'; and that when they cannot, they are clear as to the reasons why.

Foster carers have excellent training opportunities and all key areas for safeguarding are updated regularly. Foster carers appreciate the quality of the trainers and feel that the learning helps them improve the quality of care they offer to young people.

Supervising social workers visit foster carers at least once per month, some of these visits are unannounced and they also speak to children in placement to make sure their experience of care is positive. Foster carers value this support and consistently fed back that the agency social workers are always available and often go the extra mile to help them through difficulties. They feel that no issue is too small to raise and that the advice and support from the agencies out of hours service, is excellent.

All foster carers are subject to an annual review process to help identify areas for learning and development and to address any shortfalls in the quality of care. The supervising social workers produce clear reports to inform this process and make use of feedback from young people and the professional network.

The agency is successful with recruiting new carers and new applicants undergo a rigorous assessment to ensure they have the right skills and qualities to deliver high quality of care to young people. The fostering panel includes a range of suitably qualified and experienced members, they scrutinize each assessment and explore any areas of concern to be satisfied that they only recommend approval for suitable applicants. The panel chair is highly competent. She has extensive knowledge and experience of fostering and child protection. She provides clear feedback to the

agency on the quality of the information presented to panel and this means that panel recommendations are based upon sound evidence.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people benefit from strong attachments to their foster carers, who take a nurturing approach to encourage positive behaviour. This means that young people are generally well behaved and usually reduce risk taking behaviour once they settle in. They are encouraged to take appropriate risks in order to develop their independence and enjoy a level of autonomy that is consistent with that of their peers.

Foster carers are alert to risks and dangers. They undertake training to ensure they can respond to young people who may be at risk of exploitation, trafficking or radicalisation. They carefully monitor the internet and social media sites to ensure young people are not putting themselves at risk.

The agency works effectively in partnership to protect young people who are particularly vulnerable to harm. This ensures that agencies work in partnership to keep young people safe and placements are carefully monitored to ensure they are able to meet their needs. The agency does not always make use of referral information to assess risks or consistently update their risk assessments to reflect new information. This creates a vulnerability in the service, in that foster carers may not have all of the information they need to be clear about the vulnerabilities of the young people in their care or the action they need to take to keep them safe. In practice, carers are vigilant and worry as a good parent would. They take prompt action to inform the agency and placing authority of any concerns. The agency also demonstrates strong practice and develops effective safety plans where young people show high levels of vulnerability.

Most young people are very settled in their foster families and do not go missing or absent without permission. When they do, foster carers take prompt action to locate them and encourage their safe return. They follow the agencies procedures when young people are missing and inform the relevant agencies. The agency do not routinely assess the risks of children going missing as part of the care planning and admission process. This undermines the carers ability to be absolutely clear about how to prevent young people from going missing and means they may not have the necessary information to pass on to partner agencies, such as the police. This is particularly important to locate and protect those young people most at risk.

The agency takes effective measures to deal with any allegations of mistreatment from young people or third parties. They work in partnership with placing authorities and assist with any child protection enquires with a focus on the welfare of young

people. Complaints are rare but young people know how to raise concerns. The agency employs a children's participation officer who undertakes direct work with those young people who need extra support. This is helpful as young people who may be struggling to settle in their placements have safe space to talk and can share any concerns with him. He undertakes surveys to gather the views of young people and uses these to help address any areas of concern or to improve service provision.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The Registered Manager's post is currently vacant with the role currently undertaken by the responsible individual. He is applying to be registered for this role. He has considerable experience of working in a fostering setting as a practitioner and a manager. He is a qualified social worker and has a good understanding of child protection practice. This makes him effective in the role of agency decision maker as he has the skills and experience to evaluate assessments and quality assure the practice of the supervising social workers.

He has effective systems in place to manage information. He regularly monitors recording and ensures that records are both accurate and up to date. This enables him to have a good oversight of the quality of training and supervision of foster carers. Agency staff and foster carers comment that he is accessible and responsive when they need support or guidance. He ensures all staff, panel members and foster carer's are vetted and checked to ensure they are suitable for the role. He can easily access all of the information he needs to monitor the quality of care provided by the agency. He uses this information to spot any trends and identify areas for development. In a short time in the role, he has already made some significant improvements in respect of record keeping and all of the shortfalls from the last inspection have been addressed.

Staff supervisions are of good quality and demonstrate a focus on safeguarding, staff well-being and space for reflection. The manager takes robust action to address poor performance and acts quickly to address complaints. The manager does not have any arrangements in place to ensure he has professional supervision or annual appraisal. It is important that this is addressed so that he has support and space to reflect on his own practice and is able to focus on his ongoing professional development.

He ensures that the agency has the resources to help arrange activities for young people, such as a guitar study sessions and trips out. He also organises celebration events to help recognize and acknowledge the achievements of young people and their carers. These are well attended and appreciated.

The service has a clear statement of purpose and a young people's guide. These are regularly updated. Foster carers feel part of a team, one commented that the agency 'is like a family'. They demonstrate a common sense of purpose and commitment to helping young people make progress and feel cared for.

The Agency has a specialist worker to develop marketing strategies. They employ creative ways of reaching potential foster carers through social media. This creates a healthy stream of applicants and gives the agency a large pool from which to select the most suitable applicants. They have several levels of vetting and assessment for new applicants and are successful in recruiting good foster carers. Commissioners from placing authorities comment that this agency has a good range of high quality placements to meet the range of needs of the young people they seek placements for.

## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.