

Barnardo's Brighton & Hove Link Plus

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

Barnardo's Brighton and Hove Link Plus is a jointly funded project between Brighton and Hove Children and Young People's Trust and Barnardo's, providing mainly short-break foster care to children and young people with disabilities. Eligibility for the service is a physical, learning or sensory disability and needing a place in a school for children with special needs or attending a mainstream school with full time, one to one support. Placements include overnight stays, weekend/week breaks and for a few children, full-time foster care. The service has an experienced registered manager, a deputy manager, supervising social workers, a project worker and administrators. The agency shares the panel of the Brighton and Hove Fostering Service.

Summary

This announced key inspection examined the ability of the agency to meet the key National Minimum Standards. Some additional National Minimum Standards as well as the areas identified at the last inspection as needing improvement were also assessed. Barnardo's Brighton and Hove Link Plus provides quality care for children and young people using the service. The views of children and young people in placement and those of carers' birth children are listened to. Outcomes for children and young people are good, demonstrating individualised care and support. The complex needs of children and young people are met by the agency. Diversity and equality are promoted well in all aspects of the service. Carers and parents are happy with the agency and feel well supported. An experienced manager leads the dedicated team of workers at the service. Shortfalls identified at this inspection have not had an impact on outcomes for children and young people. Actions have been made as not all carers are trained in child protection, gaps on prospective staff application forms have not been followed through and the Statement of Purpose does not contain the required information. Recommendations have been made as not all foster carers have been trained in first aid, there is no policy on what is expected of foster carers in preparing children and young people for independent or semi independent living and not all carers have been supervised by qualified social workers.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Most shortfalls identified at the last inspection have been addressed. HIV/AIDS training is available to all foster carers. Copies of qualifications are signed to confirm the originals have been seen. Advocacy is available for young people with communication difficulties in full-time foster care. However, as noted at the last inspection, it was not possible to verify that all foster carers have been trained in first aid.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Carers have the skills and knowledge required to safely meet the children's and young people's health needs. The matching process is undertaken with great care, so as to ensure any complex health needs of the children and young people are met by foster carers. The majority of placements are short breaks which means the primary responsibility for the health care needs of children is with their parents. The agency takes seriously its responsibilities for the health of children looked after and policies and procedures are in place which support good practice

overall. Medical consents are in place and carers are trained in the administration of medication. Records of medication administered are kept by foster carers and monitored by the service. Carers are knowledgeable about the importance of the safe storage of medication. Specialised training is provided, for example gastrostomy feeding and blood borne viruses. First aid training is available, but as per the last inspection, not all carers have completed this. The agency maintains a training matrix which lists all training facilitated by the service and attended by carers. Any training undertaken outside of the service, for example by main employers, is not recorded on the matrix. The training record shows that not all carers have been trained in first aid. Specific details, for example on first aid and HIV/AIDS are included in the carer's handbook. Carers understand the importance of healthy eating and provide healthy meals for the children in their care. Health matters are discussed in carers' supervision sessions to ensure that children's health care needs are closely monitored. All children are registered with health practitioners and have regular check-ups. Children receive regular school medicals. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provides services to many of the children. Carers and teachers also receive support from the CAMHS service regarding the management of challenging behaviour. The Specialist Health Nurse and the Looked After Children's Nurse are available, to provide advice and deliver training to carers. There are well established working relationships with key professionals and other agencies to promote the overall health of fostered children. Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities and work in partnership to promote good health for the children they care for.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Responsible Individual is suitably qualified, skilled and experienced to run the service. She makes regular visits to the agency and has met with some parents and carers. All necessary checks are undertaken on staff, volunteers and foster carers before their employment commences. Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed every three years. Staff recruitment is generally robust, but gaps on an application form have not been followed through. All people working for the service are suitable people to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. All social work staff employed by the agency are appropriately qualified and registered with the General Social Care Council. There is a good training programme for staff who are also encouraged to attend conferences. The small team enables all staff members to know the children, their parents and the foster carers. A placing social worker commented, '...the service is very good and provides excellent care. All of the families I know of are great'. Children's safety is central to the recruitment process. Assessments are thorough and evidence based. Foster carers' homes are assessed as part of the assessment process and by the annual reviews. Solid health and safety checks, safe caring plans and risk assessments are completed. A home safety handbook is given to carers which further raises their awareness of health and safety issues. The matching process takes into account the needs of the children and the foster carers' abilities to meet the needs. Dedicated matching meetings discuss the individual needs extremely thoroughly to ensure appropriate placements are made. Careful and gradual introductions take place before the children start to stay with carers' for their short breaks to ensure any likelihood of disruption is reduced. Placements are stable, with the most common reason for change being the young person transferring to adult services. A placing social worker notes, '...the service provides a high calibre of carers who are well matched to the children...'. Children are placed with carers who have sufficient skills and information to meet the needs of the children. A safeguarding and protecting children policy is in place. All staff and foster carers are expected to attend child protection training, with staff receiving regular refresher

training. Not every carer has completed child protection training however. The service presents assessments to the Brighton and Hove local authority fostering panel. Panel members are competent in their role and provide a clear quality assurance role. The work of the panel helps to ensure that carers are suitable people to look after children. Feedback from the panel indicates a high standard of assessments are completed by the service. The registered manager is a qualified social worker and is very experienced in working with disabled children. The staff are experienced and clear about their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children. This results in good safety outcomes for children. The carers have a good understanding of the children's need for privacy and have talked to their own children about this. Carers are trained in behaviour management which focuses on praising positive behaviour and avoiding conflict. Children's behaviours are managed positively. Carers are given written information about behaviour management, bullying and also the procedure to follow if a child is missing. Support services are personalised to the needs of children. Workers of the service are knowledgeable about meeting the diverse needs of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service has a clear equalities policy which emphasises the commitment to equal opportunities. Training is provided for foster carers on equal opportunities and cultural diversity as part of the initial preparation training. The comprehensive assessment process provides prospective carers with the time to reflect on these issues. Once approved, carers are able to attend further training on these areas. Staff can access Barnardo's support forum for black and minority ethnic staff. All workers are knowledgeable on diversity issues. The service is aware of the ongoing need to recruit carers from diverse backgrounds in order that they can meet the whole range of children's needs referred. Activities are promoted by foster carers according to the child's individual needs and wishes. One carer described how '...a good balanced lifestyle is very important to the children. ...includes gym, swimming, gardening, music'. Children are supported to take part in activities at the foster home and in the local community. Carers involve children and young people with their extended family life, to enable them to experience positive experiences in their leisure time. The service has good links with all local special schools and colleges. Carers are in frequent contact with the teachers of the schools where their foster child attends. Foster carers support children with their homework and ensure good attendance at education. Children are assisted in developing their communication skills through use of Makaton sign language and other systems, such as the use of a communication box. The fostering service ensures that all children and young people are encouraged and supported to do well and to reach their potential. The majority of placements are short break placements for children with a disability. This means that parents are the main carers for their children. Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs. Short term breaks are provided as a service to families in need of respite. All staff emphasise the importance of building good relationships with parents, in order that the short break system works effectively.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

For children having short breaks in foster care, contact with family is not required, as they live with their family for most of the time. The few children living in full-time foster care are supported in having contact with family. All such contact is contained in a care plan and the arrangements are specified by the placing social workers. Foster carers of long term placed

children ensure that contact takes place. Foster carers know it is important to build good relationships with birth parents. Foster carers are committed to working together with the agency and parents to promote the child's welfare. An annual quality assurance review monitors the quality of service provided to children and young people. The registered manager produces an annual report which is well written and includes comments from parents, carers and children's drawings. Regular newsletters are produced and sent to parents and foster carers. Parents and carers give verbal and written feedback on how well they feel the service is meeting their needs. Parent and carer consultation meetings are held. These provide opportunities for discussion about any changes in the service as well as suggestions. An example of something that has been altered as a result of a meeting is replacing a picture in the teenage children's guide. Parents and carers are consulted about policies, practices and the development of the service. They are involved in the recruitment of staff, recruitment and training of new applicants, and attend social events. Children of prospective carers are interviewed as part of the assessment process. Foster children and birth children of foster carers are consulted as part of the carers annual review process and foster children are consulted about their looked after child reviews. Many children using the service have limited verbal communication or reading skills, but they have access to appropriate means through which they can express their views. Children and young people are able to access an independent advocate. Young people are involved in the day to day running of the service wherever possible, for example, questions from young people have been used as part of the interview process of prospective staff. There is a complaints procedure in place. An assortment of complaints leaflets are available for carers and young people. Parents are advised by the service about how to make a complaint. Complaints made since the last inspection have been dealt with appropriately.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people have pathway plans completed in preparation for their move to independent living and semi independent living. Parents remain central to the decision making and any planned moves. Foster carers receive support from the service to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to a young person preparing to move into independent or semi independent living. All young people are consulted about their futures and are encouraged to be involved in decision making processes and implementation of the pathway plans. The agency does not however, have clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi independent living.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the agency. Despite being reviewed in 2007, it does not include all the required details. The children's guide is produced in different formats with pictures, symbols, large print, drawings and photographs. The registered manager is a qualified social worker and is nearing completion of her management training. The registered manager and the deputy manager are visible and available to children, parents and carers as well as staff. Staff and foster carers are well supported through the provision of training, regular structured supervision and annual appraisals. Staff know who to contact on occasions when the registered manager is not available. Regular staff meetings are held to enable the sharing and development of good practice. All case records are securely stored. Fostering social workers are supervised regularly and each worker has a manageable caseload.

Workloads are reviewed at supervision and are adjusted from time to time to ensure objectivity. There are sufficient numbers of staff to be accessible by children, carers and parents. Foster carers are very satisfied with the quality of support received from the service. There is an excellent range of training opportunities available for staff and carers from Barnardo's and the local authority. These courses assist staff and carers in providing the best possible care for the children using the service. A thorough induction process is in place for new staff. The agency has started to implement the Children's Workforce Development Council's standards for foster care. Not all foster carers have been supervised by qualified social workers, but this has not impacted upon their ability to care for the foster children.

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
1	review and revise the Statement of Purpose to ensure it contains the required information (Regulation 4)	8 February 2009
15	ensure all gaps on application forms are followed through before employment commences (Regulation 20.3)	8 November 2008
9	ensure all foster carers are trained in child protection (Regulation 17.1)	8 November 2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure all foster carers are trained in paediatric first aid (NMS 12)
- compile a policy detailing what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi independent living (NMS 14)
- ensure foster carers are supervised by appropriately qualified social workers (NMS 22)

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.