

Richmond Fostering Services

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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| Date of last inspection | 03/03/2008 |

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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| 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

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames fostering service aims to provide a range of fostering services, which comply with the national minimum standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The primary aim of the service is to provide a range of high quality foster placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of looked after children and young people.

The service is based in Twickenham, close to other local authority services. The types of the service offered are: task-centred, long term fostering, family and friends foster carers, specialist foster care, short break care and supported lodging scheme.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this announced full inspection, all key national minimum standards (NMS) were inspected.

This is a good service with a number of outstanding outcomes. Children's and young people's welfare is enhanced by the good relationships that exist between them, staff and foster carers. Children and young people are encouraged to eat healthily. They live in a safe environment. Children and young people receive individualised support. Their educational attainments are well promoted. The fostering service works closely with a wide range of agencies in order to meet the full range of children's and young people's needs. There are good opportunities for staff training in a number of areas such as safeguarding. Foster carers have opportunities to attend various training for their professional development. Staff are well supported by the Registered Manager who is committed to promoting the welfare of children and young people and focusing on improvement.

Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering service was asked to ensure that they include the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted in the children's guide and the complaint procedure.

The service has acted upon this. This step helps to promote children's and young people's welfare.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children's and young people's individual health care needs are well assessed and these are met accordingly. Children's and young people's files provide good information about their health care needs. The fostering service has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote the health of children and young people. The service works well to obtain the resources required to promote and secure best outcomes for children and young people and support foster carers in securing the best standards of health care. The fostering service works in partnership with the multi-agency team and other health professionals to ensure best outcomes for children and young people in foster care. The multi-agency team is dedicated to looked after children and includes a clinical psychologist and a nurse advisor. Children, young people and foster carers have easy access to multi-agency team members for advice and support.

Foster carers are well supported and encouraged through the provision of various specialist health care training and the support provided by the service. This helps to develop their knowledge and skills to meet children's and young people's individual health care needs.

Foster carers ensure that children and young people attend their medical appointments. They maintain good records of all medication administered to children and young people. Medications are safely stored in the homes. Foster carers are provided with first aid equipment and they attend first aid training.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The London Borough of Richmond has a robust recruitment policy and procedure in place to protect children and young people in foster carer. The human resources department ensures that robust checks are completed on staff, foster carers and fostering panel members prior to their appointments in order to protect children and young people in their care.

The principal manager who is the Registered Manager of the fostering services and the fostering team manager are both very experienced and suitably qualified to manage the service. Fostering social workers are all qualified and have experience in fostering tasks and in other child care work.

The recruitment and assessment officer is responsible for processing all initial enquiries from the prospective foster carers and conducts initial visits to a prospective foster carer's homes to carry out health and safety assessment checks as part of the approval process. This dedicated post was vacant from June 2009 to June 2010 and the training and development officer's post was vacant for most of 2009. This had an impact on the numbers of newly approved foster carers. However,

the fostering service has now a clear recruitment strategy in place for increasing foster carers numbers.

Foster carers' homes visited are warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children and young people living there. Foster carers are issued with carbon monoxide alarms and they are provided with health, hygiene and safety training to ensure children's and young people's safety.

A through process is in place for matching children and young people to foster carers who have the skills and provision for meeting children's and young people's individual needs. The percentage of placement disruptions or breakdown is low.

A comprehensive child protection policy and procedure is in place which protects children and young people. All fostering staff and foster carers are provided with safer caring and child protection training. There is a system in place for reviewing and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of training on child protection and safe caring. The fostering service ensures that the foster carer has a written procedure for use if the foster child is missing from home. A positive behaviour management policy is in place for dealing with children's and young people's challenging behaviours.

Since the last inspection the fostering service has appointed a new independent chair for the fostering panel. The last three fostering panel meeting's minutes demonstrated the correct composition as required by regulation. There are clear decision making processes in place to support the effective functioning of the fostering panel. Panel members come from a variety of professionals and have a range of experiences and they are provided with various training. This further underpins the good work of the fostering service.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service pays very good attention to issues relating to equality and diversity. There are sound policies in place to support this. The fostering service promotes services which value diversity and promote equality through its assessment process, in supervision with foster carers, in training and also addresses this at each foster carer's annual review. Skills to foster training provides opportunities for foster carers to develop various skills in the areas of matching needs, sex and sexuality, behavioural management and health and safety. A good range of resources are available to foster carers with regard to culture and supporting children and young people from diverse backgrounds.

The promotion of the educational attainments of children and young people is the real strength of the service. The multi-agency team for children looked after has overall responsibility for supporting children and young people and foster carers with regard to educational attainment. All looked after children have an up to date personal education plan and none of the children were permanently excluded from the school in the recent years. Children's and young people's school attendance is

high. A significant number of looked after children within the borough have passed the GCSE examination or equivalent. In this year 44% of the children have achieved 5A*-C grades GCSEs.

The short break care team is responsible for providing a short break service for children and young people with disabilities. This team provides various information for the benefit of parents and short-term carers. The short break care service has its own panel which is separate from the mainstream fostering and kinship carers. There are a number of policies and procedures in place for its own functions. There are networking opportunities between the short breaks service, main fostering service and other stakeholders within the local authority such as health, education and the safeguarding board. Where possible, joint training is arranged and social events are shared.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has clear procedures for contact arrangements and foster carers are provided with training in this area. The service clearly encourages children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts. Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining these relationships and are positive about the arrangements made for contact. Contact arrangement issues are discussed and reviewed as part of children's statutory reviews and annual foster carer's review meetings.

There is an appropriate mechanism in place by which to consult the children and young people. This includes children and their family members being encouraged to be involved in the review process. The independent review officer meets with children and young people and ensures that they are given the opportunity to fully contribute to their review. The service is commissioning an advocacy service called 'Voice' for children and young people. Evidence shows that children and young people have full access to the internal advocacy service called 'view point consultation'. A participation worker supports children and young people to take part in this consultation process.

The service ensures that children and young people are listened to and encourages them to read and be aware of their complaint policy and procedure. The complaint procedure includes the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted. The fostering service follows the complaint policy and procedure of the London Borough of Richmond. Staff keep records of all complaints received by the service and how these are investigated within the set timescale. All formal complaints are dealt with by a complaint investigation officer employed by the borough.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service prepares young people well for adulthood and leaving local authority care. The leaving care team is responsible for coordinating the young people's plans for moving on to semi or independent living. The service is proactive for preparing young people for adulthood. The assessment process starts at the age of 16. Pathway plans are in place for young people preparing for semi or independent living. Foster carers are provided with preparation for independence and pathway planning training.

Foster carers encourage and support young people to develop various living skills, for example, looking after personal space, travelling, budgeting and shopping. Foster carers ensure that all sixteen plus young people open bank accounts and allowances are paid into their bank accounts.

Allowances and expenses are paid to all foster carers for enabling them to support children and young people achieving very good outcomes. Children and young people are able to access the additional resources needed to ensure good outcomes. Young people are provided with personal computers. There is a clear written policy on financial arrangements and payments to carers which is updated annually. Carers are paid in a timely fortnightly payment direct into their bank account. The finance team are directly available to answer queries on a financial nature.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Overall, good arrangements for supporting staff, foster carers, children and young people are in place. The service has a clear Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service. The service has developed a guide for children and young people in foster care which is appropriate to the age and ability of the children and young people using the service. The children's and young people's guide has included the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The fostering agency provides a service tailored to meet the specific individual needs of children and young people that considers all aspects of diversity. All staff and foster carers have attended equality and diversity training. Staff are recruited from various minority ethnic groups and have very good understanding of children's and young people's dietary, religious and cultural needs. Staff support children and young people to make personal choices and access community resources.

The service is well managed with an effective management structure in place. There are clear lines of accountability in place. There are effective management systems in place for monitoring referrals, completing assessments for approval or disapproval and reviews. Fostering staff are well supported through the provision of training,

regular supervision and annual appraisals. However, the fostering team manager's post was vacant between March 2009 to November 2009 and in addition to this four fostering team managers have managed the services since the last inspection. These arrangements had an impact on services in terms of delivering various policies and providing leadership. However, a new fostering team manager was appointed in November 2009.

Children and young people are supported by a good mixture of skilled and experienced foster carers and staff. Supervising social workers conduct regular supervision to foster carers. Supervision notes cover all areas of individual children's needs, for example, health, education and contacts. Social workers from the looked after children's team visit children and young people at home. Social workers informed the inspector that children and young people also visit them in the office.

Foster carers receive various training in order to develop their knowledge and skills to provide high standards of care and support to children and young people placed with them. Appropriate out of hours support is in place for foster carers. The service arranges transport facilities where needed for foster children and young people to attend therapies, contact meetings and schools. However, foster carers advised the inspector that there are very limited weekend training opportunities available to them.

Foster carers' case records are well maintained. The terms of approval and foster carers' agreements are kept in the files. Foster carers are clear about what information is required to be kept of children's and young people's files, for example, records of significant events.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers are provided with opportunities to attend training during the weekend. (NMS 19)