

Eden Foster Care

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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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

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

Eden Foster Care is an independent fostering agency. It trains, supports and provides foster carers for a wide range of children and young people placed by local authorities.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was the agency's first full announced inspection. All key standards were inspected and the majority of the standards and regulations are met. The service is satisfactory overall with some good elements.

Children and young people make progress and are safe in placement. They benefit from being looked after by carers who are appropriately assessed and who offer security and stability. Good health is promoted and children and young people are encouraged and supported to pursue their education. A high level of support is offered to carers who are well supervised and undertake relevant training. The agency satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity for foster carers and children and young people.

The main areas of concern are the composition and functioning of foster panel and the staffing of the agency. Panel membership is not fully compliant with the regulations and the scrutiny of prospective carers is not rigorous enough. Staffing within the agency is insufficient, resulting in a conflict of interest in several areas of practice which blurs areas of responsibility and compromises effective management accountability.

The majority of these shortfalls do not impact directly on outcomes for young people. The provider immediately responded to these deficits however by re-organising panel and employing additional staff in order to improve these safeguarding processes for children and young people.

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the agency's first inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people's good health is promoted and maintained. The fostering agency ensures that the fullest information possible is secured so that young people's health needs are quickly identified and addressed. Foster carers have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They confirmed that the agency promotes healthy eating and achieving a balanced diet.

Each young person is registered with a range of local primary health care services. This ensures that any minor ailments can be promptly attended to and that immunisations, dental and optical health checks are kept up to date. Where necessary, young people receive specialist help to address specific health conditions or to help meet their emotional and psychological health needs.

Foster carers closely monitor young people's health and report promptly any accidents or concerns to the agency. First aid training is provided for foster carers so that young people can be safely cared for in an emergency.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are looked after by an agency that is run by those with appropriate qualifications and experience in protecting and promoting the welfare of children.

Safeguarding for children and young people is satisfactory. Prospective foster carer assessments are comprehensive and consider applicants' competencies in relation to caring for looked after children and young people, although analysis of this information is not always thorough. There is careful matching and foster placement agreements clearly show how the skills of foster carers meet the needs of children and young people needing placements.

Foster carers confirm that they receive a high level of support, advice and guidance. Regular supervision and training on a wide range of safeguarding issues is provided by the agency. Safe caring documents are in place for each young person and these arrangements are discussed with them on placement.

Foster carers have clear guidance on behaviour management and written information is explicit on acceptable strategies. Training and information is offered to carers to enable them to recognise and deal with any bullying, and sound procedures are in place to respond to children and young people who go missing. Foster carers' homes provide young people with sufficient space and are well furnished and maintained. Health and safety checks are routinely carried out.

The fostering panel meets within regulatory requirements in terms of its composition and includes representatives from health and education. It is balanced in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. Prospective foster carers are invited to panel and made to feel welcome. They are subject to questioning from panel members to clarify points raised in the assessment process.

Overall however, the foster panel is not rigorous and robust in its consideration and analysis of the assessments presented at panel. This risks placing children and young people with foster carers whose suitability to foster has not been adequately scrutinised.

There is also conflict of interest where individuals are part of panel, but are also employed by the agency in other capacities. Although this has no direct impact on children and young people, this compromises the legality and accountability of foster panel and its decisions.

Sessional workers are employed to undertake assessments on prospective foster carers. Inspection of personnel records identified that some information required under Schedule 2 of these regulations had not been secured for these individuals, which compromises children and young people's safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes equality and values diversity. The agency provides a range of carers who meet children and young people's cultural, ethnicity and linguistic needs. This helps to reinforce a positive sense of identity. Foster carers work with young people to promote a sense of self-worth and confidence and to support their interests or talents. They celebrate young people's achievements and look for opportunities to boost young people's individuality and self-esteem.

The agency has in place good policies, procedures and support to ensure that young people's educational needs are met. Young people receive clear messages about the importance of a good education. Foster carers ensure that young people are up in time, properly dressed and equipped for the school day, and are punctual. Foster carers support children and young people to access a range of activities and resources in the community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Foster carers confirm that contact is promoted and supported by the agency in accordance with care plans. Some young people are of an age where they make their own decisions about contact with family and friends. In each case, sound

arrangements are in place to ensure young people are safeguarded during such visits.

The agency has been in operation only a short while so consultation with children and young people at a more strategic level is still work in progress. Children and young people are however consulted on day-to-day issues, and this is done in a way that is commensurate with their age and understanding. The agency also ensures that foster carers' own children are consulted. This enables them to independently express their views on their fostering experiences.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

None of the young people placed with this agency are of an age where pathway planning is a requirement, although the agency has a policy in place to meet this eventuality. One young person explained that they have acquired a range of independence skills, however, such as cooking, washing up and ironing.

Foster carers exceed national rates of pay. They confirm that they are always paid on time.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The Statement of Purpose provides clear basic information of the services offered by the agency. Children and young people are given a welcome pack that includes various ways to access support and advice with useful contact details. The guide available for children under the age of 10 however does not include all the information recommended within these standards.

Foster carers confirm that they receive a high level of support. On call arrangements ensure that a member of the agency can be contacted at any time. There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers to ensure young people receive consistent standards of care. This includes providing foster carers with opportunities for training and development, out-of-hours support, supervision and unannounced visits.

Both the Registered Manager and the Responsible Individual are suitably skilled, experienced and qualified to run a fostering agency. They are however involved in day-to-day tasks such as assessing and supporting carers as well as trying to manage and develop the service. A lack of effective staffing arrangements means that professional roles are not entirely clear and leads to a conflict of interest on occasion. This has implications for children and young people where safeguarding issues are concerned.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The foster panel represents a

range of individuals in terms of age, gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Carers are drawn from a range of backgrounds which provides young people with a variety of role models. Children and young people are placed with foster carers who reflect and reinforce a positive sense of cultural identity and belonging. These carers have a detailed knowledge of children and young people's individual needs and are able to ensure that these needs are met.

Secure arrangements are in place for files and records and young people's individual progress and achievements are recorded in line with regulations. Some minor recording shortfalls were identified at this inspection, but greater scrutiny of the agency's operation will address this issue.

Proper financial procedures are in place and clear information is provided to purchasers of services.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
15	obtain full and satisfactory information in respect of each of the matters specified in paragraphs 1 to 6 of Schedule 1 (Regulation 20)(3)(d)(i)	11/11/2010
30	ensure that no independent member of the foster panel is employed by the fostering service provider (Regulation 24 (9)(b))	11/11/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care (NMS 30)
- ensure that the children's guide includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children (NMS 1.5)
- provide an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the fostering service (NMS 17).