

Rutland County Council Fostering service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC043838
Inspection date	18/12/2007
Inspector	Trisha Gibbs
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Rutland County Council, Catmose House, Catmose Street, OAKHAM, Leicestershire, LE15 6HP
Telephone number	01572 722577
Email	
Registered person	The Governing Body of Uppingham Community College
Registered manager	Katie Arnold and Kate Greaves
Responsible individual	Steve Attwood
Date of last inspection	14/08/2006

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Rutland fostering service is based in Oakham and is placed within Rutland's Children's Services.

There are currently 18 carer households providing placements for 10 children. Some carers also provide flexible day-care and respite to support placements.

The small group of carers provide a wide range of placements including long and short term, mother and baby and kinship care.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This inspection was announced. This was a proportional inspection following a full key inspection last year. Full consideration was given to pre-inspection documentation submitted by the service. Other files and records were referred to during the inspection. The managers and some of the staff team were interviewed. Carers were not visited on this occasion but carers were consulted at a carer support group meeting. The Fostering Panel was not observed but the Chair was consulted by telephone and recent Panel minutes inspected. An Independent Reviewing Officer was also interviewed by telephone.

Rutland fostering service continues to utilise a small group of carers to creatively provide good placements. The carer group is increasing and carers with new skills are providing a valuable addition to the body of more experienced carers.

The fostering team works closely with the fieldwork team to provide very good outcomes for children in their health and education. Very good attention is given to providing safe placements and children are appropriately consulted by social workers and carers.

Carers are provided with a very good training programme and very good support systems.

Innovative work is being undertaken to increase family and friends placements with some success.

Improvements since the last inspection

No requirements or recommendations were made on the occasion of the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health needs of children and young people are very well met. Individual health needs are appropriately detailed in Looked After Children paperwork and other planning documents. Carers maintain details about children's health appointments and essential routine health checks on a separate health file. This record captures important health information that will move with them when they leave the placement.

Full health assessments are undertaken on an annual basis and these and other routine medical checks are up-to-date. Health care needs are routinely discussed and monitored during carer's monthly supervision. Extra funding is provided by the service for some leisure activities. Children are supported by carers to enjoy activities that will promote their health, including swimming, riding and football.

Carers have all received first aid training in addition to other courses that relate to good health. These include sexual health and mental health awareness. Some young people have been referred to Community Adolescent Mental Health Service team for assessment. Carers also have access to advice and support from this team.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The service is managed by two qualified and experienced social workers, both of whom have an additional management qualification. Staff recruitment and selection processes are clear and appropriate processes have been followed for the most recently appointed team member.

Carers have a very good awareness of the need to keep children safe. Very good safe care plans, placement risk assessments and health and safety checklists are in place. These are regularly monitored and reviewed in supervision. Carers have been provided with training about allegations against foster carers this year. They demonstrated a good understanding about the impact of allegations and the role of the safe care plan. Carers are also routinely provided with training on safeguarding matters in addition to other training that relates to the impact of abuse. No children in placement share bedrooms. All carers are visited twice a year on an unannounced basis.

Good matching processes are in place. Fostering social workers work closely with field social workers to identify appropriate placements for children. Records evidence excellent matching considerations where placements are of a planned or longer term nature. The small carer group has become skilled in providing a range of placements and work together to support identified placement shortfalls.

The development of the family support service has ensured that in the first instance family and friends are where possible included in discussions about placements. Where appropriate children might be matched with extended family members.

There have been some changes in the Fostering Panel membership. An appropriately experienced and qualified new chair has been appointed in addition to some new panel members. The panel continues to be properly constituted. Panel records show that the panel takes on a good quality assurance role as well as reviewing thoroughly the panel business. The panel training day this year focussed on permanency planning.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Carers are provided with training on equality and diversity. Where children and young people have additional placement needs, carers work hard to support these. Managers have noted a shortfall in placement choice for children who have complex disabilities and continue in their effort to recruit for suitable carers. Currently the respite service is provided through day and overnight care.

All children have a Personal Education Plan and are attending school or college. There are commendable examples of carers taking the initiative to support young people's educational needs. Some carers are working very closely with schools to maintain tenuous school placements. Some young people are receiving extra tuition. Examples were seen of individual educational achievements.

Carer records and supervisions show that children's education is prioritised and given very good attention. Children's files also indicate good partnership working between social workers, school staff and carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Carers actively support and facilitate contact arrangements. Records confirm that these are risk assessed, evaluated and reviewed by the child's social worker. Carers discuss and feedback contact issues within their supervision sessions and report outcomes in their own records. There are good examples of carers support positively impacting on the parent-child relationship. Links with family members are also

actively considered and promoted through the family support service. Children actively participate in these meetings where possible and appropriate. Very good training for carers and workers has been provided this year with regard to contact arrangements, and memory and life story work.

Young people are provided with information about how to make a complaint and about the role of the participation (children's rights) officer. They are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews unless this is deemed by key workers as not being appropriate. They are consulted by their social workers at the time of carer reviews and a new form has been added to the carer's review to represent their views. Carers also advocate on their behalf. The County Council Corporate Parent visits all Looked After Children on an annual basis.

Given the size of the small carer group, carers share a very good knowledge and understanding of each others placements. This ensures that if and when children attend for weekend respite breaks the carers have a real awareness of their likes, dislikes and needs. Very good examples were seen of carers consulting with young people in placement.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

This outcome was not inspected on the occasion of this inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose provides good clear information about the service and is updated on a monthly basis. Children are provided with age-appropriate leaflets and additional booklets.

There have been some changes to the organisational structure of the service since the last year. Although the head of inclusion has overall responsibility for the fostering service, a family support team leader now supervises the two senior supervising social workers. The two senior supervising social workers continue to be responsible for the day-to-day management of the service. A full time family support service worker and a part-time supervising social worker also form part of the fostering team. Lines of accountability are clear and the staff team are well supervised and provided with good professional training opportunities. The fostering team are very well qualified and experienced in the field of child-care and child protection. Good administrative support is provided.

The service continues to recruit new carers. Between them the carers have a good mix of skills and experience to accommodate the range of placements needed. The service has recently had capacity to provide appropriate placements for young people

who were previously placed out of county. The role of the family support officer and use of family group meetings has increased the number of kinship carers.

Carers are provided with a very good relevant training programme, some of in-house and some external, presented by professional national speakers. Some carers felt that given the spread of the county and location of some training (shared with neighbouring authorities) attendance could be difficult, but the training was highly valued. The service is piloting the new Children's Workforce Development Council induction programme in the new year. Carers receive a high level of support and good quality monthly supervision. Many made positive comments about the accessibility of managers and of the swift response they receive if there is a crisis. The fostering team works alongside the children's fieldwork team and this has impacted positively on placement stability. The teams work well together to maintain placements and to support carers when the need arises. There is a well-attended monthly carer support group. The managers attend for some of this. Carer allowances meet the Government national minimum allowances criteria and enhancement payments are currently being reviewed and clarified.

Records are maintained to an excellent standard and account well for the care of Looked After Children. Both fostering files and children's main files provide good information about planning processes and decision making. Key documents are well organised and assist with the tracking of a child's care experience. Carers maintain daily or weekly logs as appropriate. They now also complete a very good six-monthly summary sheet that can provide essential information for the LAC review meetings.

The appointment of a family support officer who manages family group meetings and supervises kinship carers has significantly enhanced the service. Systems are in place to recognise the potential role of family and friends at the time of any placement referral. Family members are invited to participate in decision making processes and this has had positive outcomes over the last year.