

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA 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 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

Wolverhampton City Council Fostering Service provides a range of foster care to young people aged between birth and 18 years of age who are looked after by Wolverhampton City Council. The service provides temporary, long term, shared care for children with disabilities, short break care for non disabled children and friends and family placements.

The service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and development of all its foster carers and there is a single Fostering Panel.

The fostering team is led by a Fostering Manager, who is supported by two practice managers, supervising social workers and support workers and they are all located in Bilston, Wolverhampton.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection and all key standards were inspected. Helping young people achieve economic wellbeing was not inspected on this occasion.

The inspection looked at the progress the service has made since the last inspection in October 2006 with particular attention being paid to the requirements and recommendations made at that inspection.

The service has implemented a variety of new systems and the team have worked hard in improving practice and ensuring that outcomes for young people have further improved.

Overall this was a positive inspection and the rating for this setting is good.

Improvements since the last inspection

The fostering service has made good progress in meeting the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection in October 2006. There has been an improvement in the amount and quality of information provided to foster carers prior to a placement being made, so that all parties can be confident that they can meet the needs of the young person to be placed. There has also been an improvement in ensuring all the relevant Looked After Children (LAC) documentation is in place including the medical consent. Risk assessments are now being completed in respect of young people who share a bedroom.

The service has implemented a new matching matrix which ensures that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and dietary needs of young people are considered along with a variety of other matching factors ensuring that a young person is as carefully matched as is possible.

Foster carers are currently being reviewed annually and the service is almost up to date in ensuring that all foster carers are reviewed. The register of foster carers now includes the dates of previous reviews. There is also evidence on the foster carer's review that the criminal record bureau checks are being updated and evidence that the risk assessment is undertaken annually.

Foster placement agreements are completed, signed and include the matching matrix.

The service has recruited qualified staff to meet the staffing shortfall and most of the vacancies have now been filled. This includes ensuring a qualified social worker supports and supervises the family and friends carers. Training has also been provided to support workers in relation to current legislation and practice.

The service has reviewed the composition of its fostering panel and is currently working effectively under a new chairperson. Work is being undertaken to ensure panel members are subject to the necessary checks and this work is still being carried out, therefore, the action still stands from the last inspection.

Foster care assessments are regularly monitored to ensure quality and there is now an electronic system that identify foster carers who have a vacancy.

Recruitment campaigns are geared to advertising for carers who can look after the older child to ensure that there are sufficient foster carers with the right skills to meet the needs of all young people.

There is an overall monitoring system carried out by senior management which checks the records to ensure there are no inaccuracies or omissions.

There is one outstanding requirement from the last inspection in relation to ensuring panel members have the appropriate checks carried out and two recommendations in relation to safe care guidelines and updating the Statement of Purpose. There is also one new action and one new recommendation raised as a result of this inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Wolverhampton Fostering Service places a strong emphasis on the promotion of young people's health and development.

There are policies and procedures which provide guidance to workers and carers on how to promote the health care needs of young people. The manager has

implemented new supervision formats which cover the five outcomes and children's health is covered in detail during these sessions. Records are maintained of routine checks, for example, dentist, opticians and statutory medicals as well as specialist appointments. These systems enable workers to check that carers promote healthy lifestyles. Carers have developed good relationships with health professionals and young people with specific health needs are enabled to access appropriate professional support from, for example, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. A Looked After Children's (LAC) nurse has been appointed to develop and co-ordinate the service for young people. She is keen to ensure that all LAC receive an appropriate service to address their health needs in a timely manner.

Files contain medical details and each young person placed has an 'all about me book', which provides information about their health needs and the ways in which they prefer to be cared for. Foster carers feel that the information received at the time of placement especially in emergency placements is not detailed enough; important medical information is sometimes overlooked. They feel the fostering service share all the information they have but often there are gaps. The manager of the service has introduced a system to address this concern. A format has been implemented which now tracks any outstanding information and this is picked up and highlighted at the 72 hour placement meeting.

The health and wellbeing of young people is further ensured through a comprehensive training programme and health promotion days accessible to staff and carers.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The service has good systems in place which ensure the safety and protection of young people in their care. This is evident in policies, procedures and practice. However, there are areas where improvements would further ensure the safety and wellbeing of all young people at all times.

Currently, the service is operating with a temporary manager whilst a permanent manager is being selected. Interviewing was taking place during the inspection and a candidate has been selected and it is anticipated that the suitable person will be in post by April 2008. However the temporary managers are suitable to run the service and have safeguarded and promoted the welfare of the young people in their care.

The service ensures that all staff and foster carers are suitable to work with young people. Appropriate checks and references are undertaken and the carers' files seen are well organised and of a good standard.

Foster carers provide safe and homely environments for young people placed with them. Safety is ensured by annual health and safety checks being undertaken, unannounced visits and relevant training for foster carers. Several of the young

people visited were sharing bedrooms and there are clear risk assessments in place to ensure their overall needs are met and their safety is protected. General risk assessments are undertaken as part of the referral for a placement. Safe caring plans are discussed with foster carers and agreed by placing social workers, however, the service do not have a policy on safe care and carers do not have individual safe care plans on file.

Young people are generally well matched with their foster carers and this enables their needs to be met. A new matching matrix has been implemented and this ensures that consideration is given to the young person's assessed racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs. Duty workers ensure that as much information about the young person is gathered at the referral stage to enable them to use their knowledge of foster carers to make placements. The service acknowledges that due to a shortage of foster carers who could care for the older child, it is not always possible to exactly match a young person to a foster carer's skills. In such circumstance the service would consider how gaps would be met and this is well evidenced on their referral forms. Young people have the opportunity for planned introductions with their foster carers prior to placement, wherever possible, to enable them to make an informed decision about their placement.

Most foster carers stated there had been some improvement in the amount of information received about a young person prior to placement, which enables them to be clear as to whether they can meet a young person's needs.

The fostering service has clear child protection policies and staff and foster carers are provided with training in respect of child protection and safe caring. Any child protection investigation has been appropriately notified to Ofsted.

The fostering panel was observed at this inspection and the panel has clear policies and procedures to guide its work, which includes the action taken if the panel is not in agreement. The composition of the panel meets the required standard and panel members have an appropriate range of skills and experience. However, not all appropriate checks have been undertaken regarding panel members. The panel is led by an effective and knowledgeable chair who is rigorous in testing assessments of prospective foster carers. The panel provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process, to monitor and review the work of assessors and to provide feedback. This provides a tool to ensure that standards are maintained across the fostering service.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service values diversity and where possible encourages equality, to promote the welfare of young people. The service works within the authority's procedures for promoting equality and diversity and is highlighted in the matching process. Valuing diversity and promoting equality is a major part of the assessment process of foster carers. Training sessions ensure that the importance of working to

meet young people's diverse needs is the basis for all presentations. Foster carers endeavour to meet young people's diverse needs, including those young people with complex needs due to disabilities. The service is currently actively recruiting Black and Asian carers to meet the needs of the young people wanting placements.

Young people are encouraged to enjoy and achieve and staff and carers are aware of the importance of promoting individual needs within the foster placement. The service places a high priority on promoting the diverse needs and educational achievement for LAC and ensuring that they enjoy and achieve their personal goals.

The authority recognises young people's achievements through the annual LAC celebration event which was enjoyed by the carers and the young people. It celebrates personal, educational and sporting achievements and young people receive a medal, a certificate and a voucher.

Foster carers support young people in respect of their education and all the young people visited were attending full-time school. The service aims to improve the educational outcomes for young people through the support of their foster carers. They, in turn are supported in supervision sessions which always focus on education issues. Foster carers understand their role in school contact and attend parents' evenings and all school related events. The service makes efforts to ensure that all young people have personal education plans on file to ensure that their overall educational needs are being met.

A number of foster carers have particular skills in relation to supporting young people with a disability. The service supports specific training for these foster carers to meet the needs of these young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people's welfare is promoted through a clear motivation within the service to promote and maintain contact with birth families.

The fostering service makes sure that every young person is encouraged to maintain and develop contacts and friendships as set out in their care plan. There is clear written details on file regarding contact arrangements and these are regularly reviewed and sometimes revised as necessary. There are clear procedures to follow in their foster carer's handbook and carers spoken to gave examples about how contact was managed to ensure it was a positive experience for the young person. However, some carers were having to manage some very demanding contact arrangements and the policies of the service do not adequately advise the carers of their commitment and the support that can be offered. The importance of positive contact is emphasised on the pre-approval training and through carer's supervision sessions and reviews.

The fostering service ensures that young people's opinions are sought over all issues

which are likely to affect their daily life and their future. Young people are consulted on a regular basis by their foster carers and social workers.

Young people are regularly consulted by the service regarding how decisions are made and the services run. This consultation also includes the sons and daughters of foster carers. This results in services being child focused. Young people are also supported to attend their statutory reviews where they can give their views regarding plans for their day to day care.

Young people are provided with information as to how to make a complaint if they are unhappy about their care. Young people can access the services of an independent advocate provided by the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS). This service is demonstrating a variety of creative ways to engage with young people. The Foster Carer Newsletter advertises the services provided by NYAS and a letter is sent annually to all looked after young people to tell them about the service.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Wolverhampton Fostering service is organised in a way which delivers a satisfactory service to young people and foster carers ensuring positive outcomes for young people in their care. Good systems are in place to ensure there is regular monitoring of outcomes and child protection concerns and complaints are dealt with appropriately.

From September 2007, since the registered manager vacated her post, members of staff have been appointed to acting up posts; a practice manager has been holding the managers position and then in December 2007 an agency manager was brought in to undertake the role whilst the service has been advertising for a permanent manager. Both these managers have been qualified and well experienced to undertake this role.

The fostering service has a Statement of Purpose, which provides interested parties with useful information regarding the services available to young people placed with foster carers. However, the service has still not updated this document.

Staff and foster carers are provided with detailed policies and procedures to guide them in their work with young people.

There are clear management structures within the organisation even though there have been several management changes over the last six months. Staff receive

regular supervision, annual appraisals and appropriate training is available for them to access.

All foster carers have an allocated qualified social worker. Good support and supervision practices are taking place which ensures that children's care remains appropriate and is constantly reviewed and evaluated. Formal supervision sessions take place on a regular basis and carers feel well supported which in turn enables them to effectively support the children and young people who are placed with them. The service provides extra support to foster carers when there is a crisis and this team of support workers provide a range of support services to meet the needs of both the carer and the young person placed with them. Out of hours support is provided by the authority's out of hours team and the excellent services of the Foster Care Centre. Foster carers confirmed that the Foster Care Centre provides a variety of services which meet their overall support and training needs and that it is a valuable asset to the service.

All foster carers have entered into a foster care agreement, which confirms the expectations of them and the support that they can expect from the agency. However, this agreement does not clarify the expectations of the department in relation to extensive contact arrangements and the support that can be offered.

Records regarding foster carers are maintained securely and are well managed, audited and up to date. The service keeps a register of foster carers and young people.

The agency has improved its quality assurance. Both the manager and the senior management team have a clear role in auditing records and assessments. This provides a useful tool to improve overall social work practice and ensures a consistency across the service.

Family and friends foster carers and the young people placed with them are not as yet well supported by the fostering service. A qualified worker has been appointed to take on the role of developing this service but it is in its very early stages and priority needs to be given to these carers in the same way as for any other carer.

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
32	provide family and friends carers with training, advice,	03/03/2008

	information and support as appears necessary in the interests of the young people placed. Regulation 17	
30	ensure that all panel members have the appropriate checks carried out in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. Regulation 20.	01/04/2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is a clear statement of aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide. NMS 1.1
- ensure that safe care guidelines are provided, based on a written policy, for each foster home in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. NMS 9.3
- provide help and support to the carer in dealing with any difficult contact issue that may arise and that this is clearly articulated in the Foster carers agreement. NMS 10.7.