

Sheffield Local Authority Fostering

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Registered manager	Paul Harold Massey
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Date of last inspection	08/11/2006

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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

Sheffield Family Placement service provides foster care as part of a full range of accommodation for looked after children.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

The purpose of this visit was to follow up on requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection, and to undertake a key announced inspection. Five outcomes were inspected - Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Organisation.

Key National Minimum Standards (NMS) are generally met, and the service has more strengths than weaknesses. There are no significant weaknesses relating to health and safety issues and management.

Improvements since the last inspection

All the outstanding requirements from the last inspection are met. The service has generally adapted to changes expected of it through regulation, departmental restructuring and market forces. A marketing strategy is in place that draws on foster carer surveys and previous inspection reports. Staffing levels have increased.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service takes seriously its responsibilities for the health of children looked after. Sound policies and procedures are in place which support good practice overall. No prospective carer who smokes is allowed to foster a child under five years of age.

There are well established working relationships with key professionals and other agencies to promote the overall health of fostered children.

Improved or good health outcomes can be demonstrated for individual children who are fostered. Most children get the general support or specialist help they need to promote their good health. Children's health plans address health needs well. These are regularly reviewed, updated and acted upon with good outcomes for the child.

Children and young people have access to information, advice and are offered choices where possible. Children and young people have appropriate knowledge of healthy lifestyles and feel encouraged and supported in developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Placements are made with carers whose assessments and continuing approval status are subject to rigorous scrutiny by people with a good understanding of the needs of children. Poor quality applicants are screened out at an early stage. Assessments are thorough and evidence based.

There are sound child protection procedures, implemented by staff and carers. Children's behaviour is managed positively. All children are cared for safely without suffering further avoidable significant harm for the duration of the placement. There is a high level of placement stability. Anti-bullying and absconding policies and procedures are in place. Accidents and incidents are recorded, along with the dispensing of medication.

Children are able to raise complaints and concerns, and the fostering service ensures these are acted upon. Independent services are available for young people. Allegations and complaints are dealt with promptly using recognised procedures. There is a system in place for referrals relating to the Protection of Children Act.

Carers, children and young people reported that matching was 'good' and 'outstanding' in their surveys, however Foster Placement Agreements do not always show matching considerations.

Fostering panel considers all changes in terms of approval, including any exemptions to the usual fostering limit. The fostering panel has a clear role in matching children to long-term foster carers. Minutes of previous panel meetings demonstrated that there is rigorous and robust discussion of each case presented.

Out of category placements are made on a regular basis to cope with the demand for placements. There was no evidence that risk assessments are routinely undertaken where bedroom sharing is concerned, or that children already in placement are consulted.

The fostering service welcomes independent scrutiny of its placement arrangements. The fostering panel produces an annual report. The quality assurance role and annual report of fostering panel is limited. It does not include information about annual reviews, disruptions, variations, allegations and complaints.

Staff and carers are demonstrably safe and suitable to work with children, but gaps

exist in some cases regarding pre-employment information. Carers are regularly supervised and receive unannounced visits.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service meets the educational needs of each child in a manner consistent with the principles and practices of being a 'good parent'.

The fostering service ensures that most children and young people are encouraged and supported to succeed and to reach their potential. They are reinforced and rewarded when they make a positive effort and do well, and there is an emphasis on out of school learning.

The fostering service sets and monitors targets for children's school achievements. The agency monitors its performance in relation to children's achievements. The agency actively contributes to the assessment of children's educational needs and progress for the planning and review process, however personal educational plans are not routinely in place. The fostering services Corporate Parenting strategy identifies the need to improve educational outcomes for looked after children.

The agency sustains good links with school, the education service, recreation and leisure departments. Foster carers attend parents evenings and open days and work closely with teachers and other educational support staff.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's views and experiences are taken seriously and viewed as central to a safe service. The service is responsive to feedback and can demonstrate improvements as a result of listening to children.

Children's views are taken into account in decision making processes, and carers understand the importance of listening to the views of children in their care.

Children's comments are recorded and incorporated into statutory review meetings. The service produces a children's guide which is provided to all children at the time of placement.

The service ensures that children are encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships, where this is appropriate. The views of the child are sought and given weight in determining contact arrangements.

The agency provides help and support to carers in dealing with any difficult contact

issues that may arise.

The opinions of carers are sought through interviews and questionnaires, but the views of parents are not routinely obtained.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The manager provides leadership in encouraging staff to keep up to date with key policy and practice developments. The service delivered remains stable and reliable despite workforce changes .

Staff and carers express job satisfaction and confidence in management. Staff demonstrate their commitment to achieving best outcomes for children in their daily behaviours and interactions with service users. There is commitment to regular, structured staff supervision and annual appraisal. Newly appointed staff report receiving induction and support and supervision.

Carers and children confirm that they receive a good and reliable service from staff who are courteous, respectful and communicate well. Enquiries from prospective carers are dealt with promptly and they are assessed within appropriate timescales.

Record management, safeguarding and other key systems and processes are in place but there are some gaps and inconsistencies in recording and maintaining such documents and systems.

There are effective methods and systems for staff and service user views to be heard and there is evidence of management action to address identified areas for improvement.

Although case records are fully up to date in the majority of case files inspected, care plans are not in place for some children and young people placed in independent fostering agencies. Family and friends placements are not assessed within required timescales.

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
24	provide an action plan to ensure that care plans are supplied for all children and young people placed in independent fostering agencies (Regulation 34)	17/09/2007

Recommendations

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

- ensure that, if a child has been abused or has abused another child, the needs of all children in the home are assessed before any decision is made to allow the sharing of bedrooms (NMS 6)
- implement a monitoring system to ensure that all required information is in place prior to employment (NMS 15)
- develop the quality assurance role of fostering panel (NMS 30)
- increase the numbers of children and young people who have personal education plans (NMS 13)
- ensure that all family and friends assessments meet required timescales. (NMS 32)