

Fostering Team - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Setting address	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Wellington House, 36 Wellington Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 1WA
Telephone number	01226 775877
Email	
Registered person	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered manager	Paul Dempsey
Responsible individual	Patricia Joan Stansfield
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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

Barnsley Fostering team provide care and accommodation to a range of children and young people who require a foster placement.

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.

Six outcomes were inspected: Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution, Economic Wellbeing 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

Staffing levels have increased and a permanent manager has been appointed. New procedures have been implemented for assessing family and friends carers. These carers are now brought to the panel within recommended timescales. All carers now have an allocated social worker.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The fostering service takes seriously its responsibilities for the health of children and young people looked after. Sound policies and procedures are in place, which supports good practice overall. Improved or good health outcomes can be demonstrated for individual children and young people who are fostered.

Generally, children and young people's care plans address health needs well. These are regularly reviewed, updated and acted upon with good outcomes for the children and young people.

Partnership working with key professionals, carers, children and young people results in good health outcomes for the young people. Children's rights are acknowledged and their views as to their health needs and how these are to be addressed, are

actively sought and acted upon where possible.

Children and young people have access to information, advice and are offered choices where possible. They 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 good.

Newly appointed staff are vetted and are suitable to work with children and young people. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks are out of date for some foster carers.

Assessments of prospective carers are comprehensive, analytical and evidence based. The fostering panel ensure that each application to foster is properly scrutinised. They consider all changes in terms of approval. Decisions for recommending approval of family and friends carers are not consistently noted.

Placements are made with carers whose assessments and continuing approval status are subject to rigorous scrutiny by the fostering panel. Members of the fostering panel have a good understanding of the needs of children and have access to appropriate training and advice.

Foster carer agreements and foster placement agreements are not always completed before children and young people are placed with carers.

The fostering service responds promptly to any allegations or serious concerns about a child or young person's safety. Staff and carers are conversant with child protection procedures. Allegations against carers are documented and referrals made as required by the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Children and young people's behaviour is managed positively. Health and safety assessments and safe caring documentation is in place. Risk assessments are undertaken where necessary.

Children, young people and carers are able to raise complaints and concerns. The fostering service ensures these are quickly responded to. Independent advocacy is available for young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensure that children and young people are provided with foster care services that value diversity and promote equality. When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Children and young people have excellent attendance at school. The fostering service ensures that all children are encouraged and supported to achieve and reach their potential. They are rewarded when they make a positive effort and do well.

Carers value education and understand their role to enable children to achieve. Foster carers attend parents evenings and open days and work closely with teachers and other educational support staff.

The fostering service actively contributes to the assessment of children's educational needs and progress for the planning and review process.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people are listened to. Their views and experiences are taken seriously and viewed as central to a safe service.

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

Children's and young people's comments are recorded and incorporated into statutory review meetings. The agency produces a children's guide which is available to the majority of children and young people, at the time of placement.

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

The fostering agency provides help and support to carers in dealing with any difficult contact issues that may arise.

Children and young people are aware of the complaints procedure and how to access this.

The service demonstrates that systems for children's full participation in discussions and decision making about their own futures, are fully integrated into the service policy and planning.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering service ensure that young people develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult life.

Young people preparing for independence are consulted about their future. They are encouraged to be actively involved in decision making processes and the implementation of the Pathway Plan.

Allowances and expenses paid to carers enable them to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. There are clear statements about entitlements and payment methods and delay in payment is avoided. Systems are in place to provide management information required for budget control.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The Statement of Purpose is clear in setting out what the fostering service will provide and how this will be provided.

Record management, safeguarding and other key systems and processes are in place. Procedures and policies exist for monitoring the fostering service and ensuring quality performance, however these are not consistently implemented.

Children's and young people's individual case files contain all the records required by the regulations, but the quality of recording is variable. Care plans for some children and young people placed in an independent fostering agency have not been provided.

There is induction training for new staff. There are training opportunities for staff and they are supported to make use of these opportunities. Staff are clear regarding their role and what is expected of them.

Carers and children and young people confirm that they receive a good and reliable service from staff who are courteous, respectful and communicate well. Carers report that staff working with them, know what they are required to do and that they are able to support them in the fostering task.

There is commitment to regular, structured staff supervision and annual appraisals. Staff and carers express job satisfaction and confidence in management.

Foster carers encourage children and young people to keep appropriate memorabilia and to help them reflect upon and understand their history.

The manager is experienced, suitably qualified and exercises effective leadership. The fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that aims to deliver good outcomes for children and young people.

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
8	ensure that before a child is placed, a foster placement agreement is in place which covers the matters specified in Schedule 6. (Regulation 34)	19/10/2007
24	provide an action plan to ensure that care plans and other essential information is supplied for all children and young people placed in independent fostering agencies (Regulation 40)	19/10/2007

Recommendations

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

- devise a system to ensure Criminal Record Bureau checks are renewed when necessary (NMS 9)