

Manchester 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

Manchester Children and Families and Social Care provides the fostering service for the City of Manchester. The fostering service offers emergency out of hour placements, short-term, long-term and permanent placements for children and young people who are 'Looked After' by the local authority. There is also a Disabled Children's Family Placement Team that provides short-term placements for families where there is a child with a disability. The service also provides for family and friend carers. An additional service of Support Workers is available and these workers support foster carers and children and young people placed.

The Fostering service is situated in the Gorton area of Manchester in a single office site and is accessible to people with disabilities. The service is in an area that is serviced by good public transport route.

Manchester Fostering Service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, approval and support of foster carers. Although, family and friend carers are assessed initially by social workers based in the area teams, the Form F assessments are completed by the family placement workers

The fostering service is divided into five teams. The teams are Recruitment and Assessment, Duty and Support, Long Term Fostering, Disabled Children's Family Placement and Support Workers team. Each team has its own designated team manager with responsibility for the management of the team.

Summary

The overall quality rating is inadequate - notice of action to improve.

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

This announced inspection was carried out by two inspectors and took place over five days. The inspection included interviews with the acting principle manager, managers and staff, an independent reviewing officer, for young people and carers, two Looked After Children's (LAC) nurses, and an education officer. The panel was observed and the panel chair was interviewed following the meeting. Six cases were case tracked, which included visits to the foster carer's homes and interviews were held with children. Various files and records were inspected. Surveys were sent out to 40 carers although only a small number were returned. The registered manager completed a self assessment and data set prior to the inspection, which provided information about the service.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection of the service in November 2006 a number of requirements had been made. Some of these had been addressed. However, a number of these were outstanding and have therefore been made again at this inspection.

The service is currently having a Service Improvement Project undertaken and this is linked into the overall Manchester Improvement Plan. It is envisaged that this will enable the service to analysis the overall service and plan future development of the service.

Funding for the foster carers support workers has been agreed for a further period of time. This service continues to provide a good level of support to carers.

There is ongoing development of policies and procedures for the service. Staff from the service are involved in developing these alongside the policy division of the authority.

The foster care treatment programme is being further developed with additional funding being approved for children aged three to six. A psychologist has been appointed to work within this area of the service.

Further work has been undertaken with the ongoing development of a commuter programme to support children, carers and professionals to ensure that education is supported by an interactive Personal Education Plan (PEP). It is envisaged that this programme will be completed and approved within the next few months.

The panel continues to further develop its role and responsibilities with ongoing training and a new vice chairperson has been appointed.

Recruitment programme for foster carers is ongoing and a recent link with a local radio station has resulted in a number of people to register an interest in being registered carers with the authority.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is inadequate.

The development of a flexible approach to the completion of health care assessments has ensured that the number of children and young people having a health care assessment has improved over the past twelve months. The LAC nurses are continuing to promote the health care needs of the young people. However, they are not routinely informed of placement changes of young people or invited to attend LAC reviews.

Health care plans are produced as part of the assessment process. Some of the plans contain limited information and it was unclear to some carers of the medical history

of the young person. Some carers were unsure what they can consent to with regards medical attention or what they should do if the matter of treatment and consent arose. Consent for health care treatment for all young people on the files reviewed was not consistently clear.

The service has developed links with the Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and provides a three therapeutic foster care placements for young people with specialist health care needs.

Training on health care issues is offered to carers as part of the foster carer training programme and is basic health care is covered in the preparation training, this is delivered by one of the LAC nurses. The numbers of carers attending training has increased but not all training is mandatory. Sudden Unexplained Death Syndrome (SUDS) training is mandatory for all carers who are approved to care for children under the age of twelve months.

There is an expectation from the service that all foster carers must record information regarding various details in relation to the young persons health in the 'Foster Carer Record Book'. This book was not routinely used by carers and some carers were not aware that this was required of them.

Young people who were interviewed said that their carers looked after them when they didn't feel well or if they needed to attend medical appointments.

Young people spoken to also said that their carers provided food that they liked and promoted healthy eating.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

A sample of staff personnel files, including the registered manager's file were inspected at the last inspection in 2006 and found to be satisfactory.

Carers met on this inspection were found to be providing a satisfactory standard of care for the children and young people placed with them. The homes were warm and maintained to a good standard to provide the young people with appropriate facilities.

Health and safety checks are undertaken as part of the initial assessment of potential carers and then the procedure is to review and update this on an annual basis. Not all of the health and safety checks were up to date and signed. This does not therefore effectively monitor the safety and well being of children and young people in all foster care placements

The matching process is not robust and therefore not safe. Some children had been placed with carers, who had not been assessed or approved to care for them. Details of the matching process undertaken and the outcome was not recorded on all carers

file. Some foster carer agreements did not reflect the approval status of the carer or the decision of the agency and this had resulted in placements made outside of the approval status of the carers. The agency experiences a high demand for placements and many approved long term placements are being used for short term resulting in additional pressure on appropriate matching.

The service has a Safe Care policy in place for carers. This is in the process of being updated by a member of the family placement staff. Current Safe care agreements are not always personalised and there was no evidence that the young persons social worker receives a copy of the safe care agreement. Written guidelines on health and safety are currently being reviewed. Information regarding when they had previously been updated was not available.

Child protection training is offered to carers. Training is not mandatory for carers and there was evidence that some carers had not had any training for a number of years. A number of policies and procedures including behaviour management were being written or updated. Therefore systems were insufficient to ensure the safety and well being of the children and young people in placements.

The process for the investigation of allegations against carers were unclear. Discussion with staff confirmed that the policy and procedure is difficult to understand. Staff and managers have raised concerns regarding this and the policy is being reviewed. The system in place to monitor allegations and complaints against carers was not robust. Records seen during the inspection did not clearly reflect what process had been followed and the outcome of the investigation.

The panel chairperson and members of the panel have an up to date knowledge of the Fostering Regulations, standards and current good practice. The panel is clear that it will not approve carers without all statutory checks being completed although it has found that in an increasing number of incidents, panel are being presented cases with incomplete statutory checks. The panel observed was quorate however, there is not a panel gatekeeper. There is no process in place for the panel to be informed of Regulation 38 placements to enable effective monitoring of these placements.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The service is aware that it needs to recruit additional carers to meet the high level of demand within the authority. A recruitment campaign is ongoing and staff feel that overall it is successful. It has a Foster Carer Recruitment policy and an Equal Opportunities policy in place. Staff and managers attend mandatory training on Diversity. Information is provided to carers on equality and diversity and is discussed and explored as part of the assessment process. Training is also made available to carers.

Carers support the children and young people with their education. Most young

people have a PEP. The authority has plans to implement a new PEP recording system that is in the process of being developed. This will enable carers, teachers and young people to contribute more effectively to the plans.

Children and young people seen were accessing activities and holidays to support them to develop their social skills. Young people spoken to were very positive about the additional activities that they had become involved in.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Contact details and arrangements are documented on individual young peoples files and are known to the carers and the young people. Some carers supervise contact and all carers are aware of the importance of contact and the impact that this has on the young person. Training regarding contact is provided to carers at the initial preparation to foster training.

The service has had a number of vacancies within the reviewing officers team. Family placement workers had been undertaking these reviews, however, recent appointments to the reviewing team have enabled the reviews to be chaired by independent reviewing officers. The Children's Rights Service has developed a consultation document, 'Have your Say', which enables the young person to contribute to their foster carer review.

Details of contact arrangements were known by the carers and supported in accordance with the young persons care plan. Young people spoken to, said that they were happy with the arrangements in place for contact.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people receive support from carers to prepare them for independent living. Training is available for carers who are approved to care for teenagers, to enable them to provide and promote independent living skills.

The service has a fostering allowance that is made available to all carers. Updated allowance details are sent out each year. In addition to the basic foster allowance, the service also provides an enhanced payment for skills allowance. This is linked to additional training that carers undertake, for example post approval and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

The service has a Statement of Purpose that has been reviewed and is currently in draft. The Statement of Purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the service.

The service is managed overall by a principle manager with five managers for the five teams, three of whom are in an acting role. Each team has a specific function including recruitment and assessment, long term fostering, duty and support, foster care support and the disabled children family placement team. The Service Improvement Plan (SIP) has impacted on the ability to finalise the service structure and this has resulted in permanent management arrangements not being made.

The service does not have enough carers to meet the demand for placements. This results in pressure to find placements which leads to poor matches and disruptive placements. Carers approved for long term fostering have taken short term placements to reduce the pressure for placements. This therefore limits the long term available placements. A significant number of children and young people are placed in agency placements which has ongoing financial implications for the service. There was no evidence of any effective system in place to monitor the use of external placements.

The service has a recruitment strategy and continues to receive high levels of initial enquires. Due to the pressure on staff, assessments are delayed and a number of prospective carers withdraw their application. The service continues to have a number of staff who are agency staff. In addition to this a number of managers are currently in temporary acting positions. Family placement staff have high numbers of cases due to the number of carers approved within the service. In addition to this there is a limited amount of administration staff to support workers with administration and this increases workload levels for family placement workers.

Most foster carers receive supervision, however, records of supervision are not made available to carers to enable them to reflect and respond to issues discussed. Most carers confirmed that they receive regular visits from their family placement workers and generally felt that the support provided was good.

The service encourages foster carers to maintain records for the children placed with them. However, not all carers are aware of the level of recording to be undertaken.

Training for is available for all carers. However not all carers attend training. Some carers have not attended training for a number of years and although training is discussed at carer reviews there is not a system in place to clarify when training was last undertaken, if not within the previous twelve months. Newly approved carers felt that the initial skills to foster and post approval training was of a good standard and informative.

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
4	ensure that there are effective systems in place to monitor matters set out in Schedule 7 (Regulation 42 (1)(a))	27/10/2007
8	make specific reference to matching in any Foster Placement Agreement (Regulation (34)(c))	27/10/2007
8	must not place any child with carers who have not been approved (Regulation 34 (1)(b))	27/10/2007
8	must ensure that all foster carer agreements are in place (Regulation 34 (3))	23/11/2007
9	ensure that clear written records are kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect, and the action taken in response (Regulation 12 (2) (d))	27/10/2007
12	ensure all carers are aware of the arrangements for giving consent to medical treatment and have clear information and practice guidelines (Regulation 17 (3)(b))	27/10/2007
17	ensure that the service has a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working for the service (Regulation 19 (a)(b))	23/11/2007
21	ensure that foster carers are given information about a child placed with them, to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child. (Regulation 17 (3) (a))	23/11/2007

Recommendations

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

- should develop systems that ensure changes in information about placements is provided to assist effective monitoring of health care needs (NMS 12)
- establish a system that notifies and invites carers to contribute to children and young peoples' Personal Education Plan (PEP) (NMS13)
- should have a clear system in place for the monitoring of foster carers files (NMS 25)
- details of family friend carers should be made available to the family placement workers within appropriate timescales of the young people being placed (NMS 32)
- should review policy and practice of foster care recording to ensure effective and

- consistent practice (NMS 24)
- should establish a process to enable the panel to be made aware of Regulation 38 placements in order for them to be effectively monitored
- consider appointing a panel gatekeeper. (NMS 30)