

# Rochdale Child Care Services - Fostering

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Setting address</b>	Foxholes Resource Centre, Foxholes House, Foxholes Road, Rochdale, Lancashire, OL12 0ED
<b>Telephone number</b>	01706 710750
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Steven Roger Murray Titcombe
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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

Rochdale fostering service has 117 approved fostering households providing 204 placements for children and young people, of which 159 are filled. Of these, 25 children and young people are in long term placements and 44 are placed with family and friends.

They also purchase 45 foster care placements from external providers to ensure they specifically meet the assessed needs and personal preferences of individual children and young people.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This judgement is reached following a five day visit to the service by two inspectors. During this time carers, children and young people were visited, staff interviewed, files and records examined, the main panel and review panel observed and at the start and end of the process there was a meeting with the management team.

Prior to the inspection, questionnaires were sent out to a random selection of young people over nine years of age, carers and social workers to ascertain their views. A self assessment questionnaire and data set was also sent to the service which was completed and then discussed in detail with the management team at an inspection planning meeting on Wednesday 25 July 2007.

### Improvements since the last inspection

There have been significant improvements to documentation and robust systems introduced in the last 12 months, whilst still maintaining excellent support to carers. Most of the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection have been addressed in full and the remainder will be addressed by the end of November, when all carers have been reviewed. There has been a delay in this process mainly due to staff sickness which is now resolved.

Most carers recognise the service has improved. Comments include, 'The team do a great job', 'Overall we would give the fostering service ten out of ten' and, 'They have really progressed. Great staff which are there to help'.

The manager is clearly committed to continue to develop the service and written action plans and timescales for the next 12 months are in place.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Overall, there are good arrangements in place to promote the health and development of the children placed in foster care. Most children and young people say they 'always get support and advice about being healthy'. They enjoy healthy, varied diets and lots of physical exercise, for example, walking, dancing, cheerleading and scuba diving. Children describe the homemade meals as, 'well good' and 'brilliant'. Consequently, many children are 'really thriving' in their placements and their physical and emotional health is 'dramatically improving'.

Carers are equally satisfied that they receive the health information they need prior to placement and that medical consent is obtained. They also confirm that the fostering service support them to ensure the children they care for enjoy healthy lifestyles. Carers are clear of their responsibilities to maintain health records, diaries and log books which inform children's statutory reviews and those seen were in good order. Examination of training records however, found that not all carers are trained in food hygiene and first aid. The latter is a legal requirement. The service currently expect carers to undertake these courses within two years of approval however, this would not meet the new training standards.

One social worker wrote, 'In my opinion, foster carers I have worked with have been very pro-active in meeting children's health needs and attend all relevant appointments. I have also observed very positive relationships between foster carers and health professionals'. Another confirmed, 'Statutory medicals and other health promoting measures are always in place and strictly adhered to'.

Children's files are in good order and they show that they are registered with doctors and dentists. The children receive timely and appropriate treatment as necessary. Annual health assessments are taking place and immunisations are up to date. There is also access to specialist services including drug and alcohol services, sexual health and emotional health. A psychologist is available to offer advice to any carer, one day a week and visits every new child placed.

## Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Overall, there are satisfactory arrangements in place to help to keep children safe. The majority of children and young people say they 'Always feel well cared for'. One wrote, 'We have good meals, a good bed and I go to clubs'. They also confirm they have people to talk to if they not happy or have a personal problem. One social worker spoke of the 'excellent relationships' three identified children enjoy with their carers and that they are 'very secure in this placement'. The manager of the fostering service is suitably qualified and experienced and has introduced significant changes to help ensure children are kept safe.

All the homes visited were decorated and furnished to a good standard, clean and comfortable. Health and safety checklists are updated annually to ensure homes remain free from avoidable risks. All the children like their bedrooms, which are decorated to their choice and they have age appropriate toys, books and personal items. Most children have their own room and those who did share had requested this. Examples of risk assessments in respect of sharing bedrooms were seen but not all are in place.

Overall, the service provides suitable matches and consequently many children enjoy long term, settled and safe placements. Placement plans now identify any unmet needs, which are followed through by the supervising social worker at the initial visit and monitored by the manager through their supervision.

Carers were highly satisfied that placements are carefully planned and discussed to ensure good matches and that assessed needs are met. One carer confirmed in writing that, 'All moves of young people to and from our care are carefully planned and negotiated involving all parties and young people are involved in the decision making process'. Another said, 'When a child is moving on there are lots of meetings and introductions. This is done in a professional manner with the social workers, link workers and the carers involved'.

Carers also confirm good information prior to placements to help ensure assessed needs are met and children stay safe and happy. However one felt, 'Overall the information is good, but not enough on abilities/disabilities'. Moreover, one matching report was unavailable on a child recently placed and sharing a bedroom. Individual risk assessments are not completed prior to placements, which provides vital information on how to better protect the foster child and all members of the household. This shortfall is recognised by the authority and will hopefully be addressed by the end of November 2007.

New guidance has been issued to staff on what must be included in their matching reports for panel. The chair recognises an improvement in the quality of reports brought to panel. However, a lower standard was accepted from an independent agency, including lack of evidence of up to date criminal record checks, a health and safety checklist and a safe caring policy. There was also little written information about the children's individuality and unique interests and nothing about their views, although probing questions were asked and key issues covered.

In the last 12 months, 10 child protection courses have been provided for carers and members of their household and by the end of November, all mainstream carers and supervising social workers will be suitably trained. Moreover any new carers, including family and friends, will complete this training within three months of their approval.

Safe caring policies are being updated prior to and are being discussed at carer's annual reviews. There are good systems in place to respond appropriately to allegations of abuse and appropriate and efficient responses to incidents of bullying. A social worker wrote, 'I have found foster carers to be very vigilant with regards to

safety. They have always discussed any areas of concerns and acted on advice given'.

Staff and panel member's files now include all the details as specified in the Regulations to confirm their suitability and recruitment and selection procedures have been tightened up. An improved system is also in place, to ensure criminal record checks are renewed every three years. The lack of checks on some members of carer's households however, were not scrutinised by the panel.

Another recent positive development is the establishment of a review panel which offers an informal setting to share experiences and for the fostering service to acknowledge the carer's commitment to the children in their care. Any changes of category, contentious issues or concerns are still reviewed by the main panel. In line with the standards, the chair acknowledges the need to provide management information to the main panel, to ensure they remain fully informed about the outcome of all annual reviews. Some carers are still not being reviewed within 12 months in line with the Regulations, but the manager has introduced a new and more robust system to address this shortfall.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Carers are highly satisfied that the service appropriately addresses issues of equality and diversity. They confirm particular sensitivity and understanding of sexuality and culture. Excellent feedback is consistently received about the cultural diversity course. The trainer is very knowledgeable and relates the session to direct practice. Good time keeping is maintained yet still enabling participants to ask any questions and detailed answers are given.

This fostering service treat and value children and young people as individuals in their own right and their unique differences and diverse preferences are respected and responded to. There are good examples of carers actively promoting positive self images and boosting self esteem. Children say they can follow their own interests, for example, young women joining the scouts and playing football and young men dancing.

There are good arrangements in place to help children and young people reach their potential. Most say they 'always' receive the right help, so they can be successful in education. Carers ensure good liaison with schools, which has prevented exclusions, advocate for services to meet special needs, attending parents evenings and special events and helping children with homework. Most carers feel there is good support from the fostering service with regard to children's education. One carer finds the resources available to be 'outstanding', including text books to prepare for scholastic assessment tests (SATs) and a computer in their home. Positive outcomes for children and young people include, full attendance, excellent school reports, above average results and noticeable improvements in behaviour and attitude.

There is a particularly good range of constructive activities on offer to fostered children and carers actively promote individual talent. Achievements include a trip to the zoo for dancing and 'players' player of the year' in football. The relatively few children met are also involved in, netball, swimming, trampolining, cross country, cheerleading and scuba diving and regularly go to the cinema, shopping, bowling and they have friends to stay over.

One social worker commended particular carers 'For their encouragement in accessing activities for the children improving their self esteem and confidence'. Consequently one young person is now, 'a totally different child, relaxed, confident and developing friends'. Another social worker wrote, 'This is a priority in this authority. For instance, an ongoing project, "positive action for young people", aims to promote young people's interests and supports them through inclusion of various activities'. Carers are particularly impressed with the summer activities and holidays on offer. Comments include, 'Providing out of school summer activities which involve education and health can help a child prosper significantly. The holidays are a fantastic way to promote independence and good self esteem for a child in care'. 'I am always informed of activities for the children especially in the summer, which the children really look forward to.'

Some children benefit from holidays abroad and three are having Spanish lessons. This helps them communicate better as they go on holiday four times a year with their carers to their villa. Two children 'really enjoyed' their holiday in France and loved all the new experiences it offered them saying, 'It was really good. The water park had massive slides. I went in the jacuzzi as well. The weather was brilliant and I made new friends' and 'It was really good. I tried frogs legs and liked them but the snails were disgusting'.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is inadequate.

Rochdale is committed to improving consultation opportunities at all levels in the authority. Annual consultation events now take place and the documentation used to prepare for statutory reviews, has been changed after listening to young people's views. They are also looking to offer support groups for children in foster care.

Young people confirm that carers listen to them and take notice of their opinions but some did not know how to make a complaint and not all had signed their placement plans, which would confirm their agreement to them. Children and young people's views are not sought as part of carer's annual reviews which is a legal requirement.

Reviews are undertaken following a disruption, but again children's views are not obtained. They are also not consistently presented for the panel as a fundamental part of long term matching reports.

Carers are satisfied that the fostering service involves young people in decisions about their day to day lives. Examples include, 'support with liaising with children's



rights', 'regular contact with social workers' and 'speaking to children in a child friendly manner and at a level of understanding for each child'.

There are good examples of carers supporting contact arrangements in line with legal directions, including providing transport and supervision in their own homes and maintaining contact with siblings. Carers visited are clear about their responsibilities to record any changes in behaviour following contact and to pass this on to the child's social worker.

However, the service is not always pro-active in ensuring young people's views are represented, in respect to contact arrangements. Some children and carers have felt unsupported and on occasions, poor advice has been given. Moreover, their views are not always reflected in the minutes of reviews and consequently specific requests are not pursued. Some reviews are taking place in the absence of young people who would like to fully contribute.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Good examples were given of age appropriate independence preparation and a social worker felt that this is one of the strengths of the service and wrote, 'I have worked with carers who actively promote and enable young people in developing self care/independent skills'. It is also established good practice in Rochdale, that young people can choose to stay in the placement until they feel ready to move into independence. Pathway plans are in place within three months of a young person's 16th birthday.

The new foster care agreement clearly sets out the allowances and expenses paid, which are in line with the Fostering Network's recommended rates. Carers are satisfied with the allowances paid by the authority and confirm prompt payments. A banding system is in place and a skills and competencies appraisal is undertaken prior to progression to level three. They are then expected to attend four courses a year, which is checked at their annual review. Allowances for family and friend carers have recently doubled with the expectation that they attend relevant courses.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The written policies and procedures accurately reflect the practices of the fostering service. There are two children's guides for under and over eights available and supervising social workers now make sure that carers have gone through this information on their first visit, following any new placement. The guides, however are currently only produced in a written format.

Rochdale is described as 'a good employer'. Managers at all levels of the authority are appreciated for being open, approachable and supportive. The fostering service

is well managed by an experienced and committed individual, who provides clear leadership and direction and regular and good quality supervision. A supervising social worker said, 'Our manager is professional and systematic with clear planning and outcomes. The sessions consequently do not drift so I can plan my own day better and yet there is still lots of time to discuss specific cases'.

There are an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff who confirm manageable workloads. All staff now support kinship carers who are actively encouraged to attend training and their annual reviews.

Carers are consistently highly satisfied with the support they receive from the fostering team to help them look after the children they care for. In fact, most feel this is an 'outstanding' aspect of the service. Views include, 'Overall we would give the fostering service 10 out of 10', 'The team have always supported me in the right way when I have needed them. They are only a phone call away. They listen and act upon some requests I have within a short time. If I have a complaint I know how to do this without feeling that I will be ignored', 'I am extremely happy with the support I receive', 'I get good support and training, they are friendly and I feel appreciated' and, 'There is always support and help for the children and myself when needed.'

Staff and carers are particularly pleased with the quality and range of training on offer and the recent improved accessibility to courses. As an example in the last year, one carer has attended, foetal alcohol syndrome, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, attachment, health promotion, in car safety, child protection, recording and storing information, loss and bereavement, first aid and has completed a national vocational qualification level 3.

Generally carers and children's files are in good order, covering all the required information and up to date. The new foster care agreement is very thorough and a new and much improved system gives the date it has been sent to the carer, signed and filed.

All the required administrative records are also now in place, well maintained and closely monitored by the manager. A good system for recording and monitoring all Schedule 7 matters is now established and for notifying Ofsted of Schedule 8 notifications. Complaints and allegations are taken seriously, investigated, outcomes reached in a timely manner and any required actions efficiently addressed.

All records held in both the offices and carer's homes are confidentially stored.

## **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
12	ensure all carers are trained in basic first aid (Regulation 17)	31/03/2008
30	ensure all carers are reviewed at intervals of not more than a year (Regulation 29)	30/11/2007
15	ensure robust systems are in place to identify all members of carer's households who require a CRB every three years (Schedule 1)	30/11/2007
30	ensure young people's views are sought during the annual review process (Regulation 29).	30/11/2007

### Recommendations

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

- consider including basic food hygiene as a mandatory course for carers (Standard 12.5)
- ensure risk assessments are in place in respect to children sharing bedrooms (Standard 6.5)
- ensure the main fostering panel is provided with sufficient information about the outcome of foster carer's reviews (Standard 30.6)
- ensure up to date risk assessments are in place for all children and young people prior to each placement (Standard 9.7)
- ensure comprehensive and up to date reports are provided to panel where a long term match is to be considered including children and young people's views (Standard 8.3)
- ensure matching reports are completed and agreed prior to every placement and they include children and young people's views (Standard 8.3)
- ensure all children and young people in foster care know how to make a complaint (Standard 11.5)
- ensure all looked after children and young people who wish to, can contribute to their statutory reviews (Standard 11.1)
- ensure children and carers are given appropriate help and support in respect to any contact difficulties that arise (Standard 10.7)
- continue to produce the children's guide in different formats to meet individual needs (Standard 1.5).