

Liverpool City Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Sharon Lloyd / Sue Winson
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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

Liverpool City Council's fostering service provides a range of placements for children and young people who are unable to live at home with their families for short or long periods. It is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are fostered.

The service operates from council offices known as Parklands in Speke, approximately eight miles from Liverpool city centre, however, meetings with foster carers and children take place in centrally located council premises. A principal officer leads the service and is assisted by three team leaders and approximately 40 social work and support staff. The fostering service works closely with the safeguarding unit and other local authority (LA) and health services including education and leisure services.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Not all key standards were assessed. The inspection focused on the breaches in regulations that were identified in the key inspection report of 26 June 2007.

Improvements since the last inspection

All of the five actions raised as a result of the key inspection of June 2007 have been addressed and new systems and documentation have been introduced to improve the service delivery in these areas. However, there has been insufficient time to determine how effective some of the new procedures are, and their impact on the children is not yet evident. In some cases, the new systems have not yet been fully implemented.

Recommendations raised in the last inspection report were not followed up and therefore have been repeated. They will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Improved arrangements for obtaining and providing consent to medical and dental treatment enable children to receive the treatment they need without delay. However, files are not kept sufficiently up to date to demonstrate this. The procedure is under further review and an improved system has been devised and is planned to

be introduced in April 2008.

Children's health is promoted and any health problems are identified and addressed. Good systems are in place to ensure that children receive initial and annual health assessments and regular dental check-ups.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

To ensure children move to a suitable long term placement without undue delay, exemptions and variations to foster carers' approval status are being closely monitored and regularly reviewed. Improved systems ensure that children who are in short term or emergency placements sleep on a full sized bed in a bedroom. However, records do not show that the child's needs are considered in determining the placement. For example, the exemption or variation to approval documentation does not always show that the foster carers' skills and experience are taken into account in before the child is placed, nor does it always show the date the placement was originally made or how any additional demands on the family are to be met.

Children's safety and wellbeing are promoted through the provision of appropriately experienced and knowledgeable panel members. However, the service could not demonstrate within its records that personal references have been obtained on all panel members.

Children's safety is promoted by good staff selection and vetting procedures. Staff files are well kept and contain all the required information. This demonstrates that staff who work for the service are deemed suitable to work with children.

Although new procedures are in place to monitor all disrupted placements, these are not yet working sufficiently well to provide the service with valuable information that can be used to prevent further placement breakdowns for children. For example, referral is made to an independent reviewing officer to chair a disruption meeting where children's permanent placements break down after three months or more. However, evidence available did not demonstrate this system working in practice. Disruptions that occurred unexpectedly in October 2007 had not been reviewed 10 weeks later. There was no evidence of referral for review contained in the confidential records available for inspection, because of this, the service is not able to formally review the support it gave to the foster carers and consider any improvements in practice that may be necessary. The service is, however, working more closely with the placing social work teams so that where there is concern that a child is having difficulties in a placement, additional support can be provided to avoid the child having to move in an emergency.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The quality of care provided to children is monitored and reviewed through regular meetings between the management team and their partners within the LA. Information obtained enables the management team to have a clearer view of the effectiveness of the service in meeting children's needs. Practice is reviewed and updated to further improve the quality of care provided to children. Foster carer and staff files are audited by managers and the management team have oversight of annual foster carer reviews. This enables managers to determine how well the placements are meeting children's needs.

No report is available that provides information showing how all the matters listed in Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations are monitored.

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	monitor and evaluate all unplanned placement endings so that information gathered can be used to improve the quality of the	31/03/2008

	fostering service and reduce the number of placement moves for children (Fostering Service Regulations 2002, 42)	
4	prepare a report in respect of the matters outlined in Schedule 7 and make this available to Ofsted at the next inspection (Regulation 42).	31/03/2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all managers, staff, foster carers and children clearly understand the policy on the use of restraint in foster care (NMS 20)
- establish closer working with the social work teams so that foster carers routinely have the opportunity to contribute to the child's Personal Education Plan (NMS13)
- make the children's guide more concise and publish it in different forms so that all children who use the service can easily access and understand it (NMS 1)
- ensure the premises used for the fostering service are clean and safe (NMS 26)
- approve carers to take children on temporary assessment placements according to their skills and competencies and ensure this is recorded on their terms of approval (NMS 8)
- ensure that copies of consent to medical treatment are held on children's confidential files (NMS 12)
- include written evidence to show that the foster carers' skills and experience are taken into account and any additional support needed is identified on the variation to approval documentation (NMS 8)
- ensure that the date of a child's placement with the foster carers is recorded on the variation to approval documentation (NMS 25)
- include either a copy of personal references or a statement verifying that personal references have been seen by a manager, are satisfactory and are held on the human resources files on staff and panel members' locally held files (NMS 25).