

Oldham MBC Fostering Services

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC043218
Inspection date	06/03/2008
Inspector	Helen Humphreys
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council, Civic Centre, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UT
Telephone number	0161 474 4637
Email	
Registered person	Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered manager	Steve Slater
Responsible individual	Ruth Baldwin
Date of last inspection	11/12/2006

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service currently has approximately 142 approved fostering households, caring for 200 children and 17 carers who are part of the Family Link Services offering short breaks to 20 children with disabilities and their families.

The service has temporary carers offering a placement in an emergency and medium to long-term care. The service has permanent carers who provide long term care as an alternative to adoption. The Friends and Family carers provide care to children who are known to them, and this may be on a short or long-term basis. The service has some respite carers who provide short breaks to families and other carers with caring responsibilities.

The service is managed by an appointed manager and two senior practitioners, and is located within the Looked After Service managed by a Service Manager. The fostering service is managed separately to the adoption service.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced inspection and covered all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS).

This is a well managed service which is supporting the carers well and providing good outcomes for children. The fostering team is supported by a dedicated Looked After Children's Nurse (LAC) and team, and a specific education service. The service is staffed by dedicated, well experienced and qualified managers and staff who are well supported and have access to training and regular supervision. The quality of the work undertaken is good.

The panel is chaired well and the membership is drawn from a wide range of professionals.

The service is continually monitored and there are ongoing developments to improve the service overall.

Two areas have been recommended for further developments, which are to ensure that the panel is conducted in such a way to ensure that there is consistent scrutiny of papers presented, and to ensure that the voice of the child in carer's reviews is consistently heard. Some carers expressed concern about placing social workers, this is beyond the control of the fostering team. However the managers are aware of the carer's views and the comments were noted. Some of the children's files from the placing social workers did not clearly indicate when children had been visited.

Improvements since the last inspection

The service has made steady progress on the recommendations made at the last inspection.

The short break service has been reviewed and a report has been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The report covers a range of issues which potentially can develop the service for children with disabilities and their families who require a short break.

The consultation work with children has developed well, and recent events have included fostered children and is part of an overall plan to provide more appropriate and timely information for fostered children.

The children right's officer's information is included in the new children's guide and Oldham Children's and Families service is in the process of tendering for a provider for the service.

The service has devised a training course to raise awareness of the need to develop independent living skills with young people and other leaving care matters. This training is delivered jointly between the after care and fostering team and includes contributions from young people.

The service has devised a range of development plans which are extensive and are regularly monitored.

The case files created by the placing social workers have been improved since the last inspection, however not all those seen on this occasion were orderly with up to date entries.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The service promotes the health and well being of children placed.

Staff, carers and young people have access to a range of health care services, including the LAC Nurse and her team, The Community Adolescent Mental Health Team, a specific counselling service called Reflections and services for drugs and alcohol mis-use. Staff and carers have direct access through the Life Chances team to a clinical psychologist and educational psychologist who provide information and advice.

The number of young people having their health care assessments has risen since the last inspection, and access to dental care is monitored carefully.

Carers have access to appropriate training including a specifically designed course on healthy care, which is delivered with the assistance of carers, sexual health,

emotional abuse and neglect and first aid. Additional information of health care related matters and in particular emotional well being is provided through the carer's support groups.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The arrangements for the recruitment and selection of staff is appropriate.

The process for placing children is good and the process is well embedded into practice. Matching is recorded and additional services as required are found where possible.

There has been an increase in the number of planned placements and most carers said that they had sufficient information about placements, if this information was known to the fostering service at the time of placement.

The service has a strategy in place for the use of independent agencies and the use of these has reduced since the last inspection.

Carers receive training in child protection, behaviour management and the service has plans in hand to implement a training programme based on the Webster Strategy work. The appointment of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has provided additional support and advice to the staff and carers in dealing with allegations and other safeguarding matters. Safeguarding issues raised in the last 12 months have been dealt with appropriately. There has only been two young people reported missing from home, and these incidents have been reviewed by the manager and no young person said that they were being bullied.

The panel chair has recently been appointed and has chaired three meetings. She is growing in her knowledge of the Regulations and NMS and is well experienced and knowledgeable about LAC and their needs. The panel membership meets the Regulations, although the service has been unable to find an ex care leaver. The panel is conducted appropriately and carers are made to feel welcome. The minutes are well written and record the discussions appropriately with sufficient detail. The panel have undertaken training twice in the last 12 months. The chair and members are beginning to exercise their quality assurance role, to ensure that all pertinent matters have been explored with the assessing social worker, carers, placing social workers and the service in general.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service provides training for carers on equality and diversity matters and these issues are taken into account in matching. The service has recruited some carers from the diverse communities within Oldham, and have plans to employ a specific worker to continue this work. Equality and diversity issues are explored through the assessment process, and all policies and procedures are subject to an diversity

impact assessment. Carers are provided additional information and assistance to ensure that specific needs, such as that of asylum seekers are met as far as possible.

The education of LAC is given a high priority within the authority. Through the Life Chances team the education provision of all LAC is monitored, and additional schemes are in place to try to encourage all young people to attend school or some form of educational provision and to do well. The Life Chances Team provide help to carers on a range of educational matters, including help with avoiding exclusion, home work, changing schools and training. The team has some learning mentors who can provide specific individual help both in school and at home. Carers report that they are well supported and training is provided and is valued.

The authority has a short break service providing short breaks to 20 children and their families. The service is well established and carers are recruited in the same way as mainstream carers. Carers are well supported and receive additional training visits and advice. The scheme has recently been reviewed and a report outlining recommendations has been written. Plans for the future direction of the service are at present under discussions, in collaboration with other developments within the overall children and families service for children with disabilities. The manager is hopeful that this service can be extended so that more children can access a short break service and that more individual needs can be met.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The arrangements for contact are good. The carer's attitude to contact is explored in the assessment and discussed on the preparation training. Contact arrangements are taken into account during matching and carers are expected to support contact. This is recorded on file and in the placement agreement. Carers are supported through supervision if contact raises difficult issues for young people.

The arrangements for statutory reviews are good and young people are encouraged to attend their reviews by carers and staff.

Oldham Children and Families employ a corporate parent manager and a participation officer, who have developed a range of projects and events to promote consultation and participation. Fostered children have been involved in most of the projects. In particular the participation officer has undertaken some work with fostered children on a new children's guide and information pack. The quality of the work is of a particularly good standard and is being used to shape further work.

Young people know how to make a complaint and information is provided to them on how to contact Ofsted and other organisations. The service has purchased a TEXT based product so that young people will be able to contact a single number if they require help or information.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are supported to develop independent living skills through the help of carers and the after care team. Most young people have a pathway plan. Carers receive training which is jointly delivered by the after care team, the fostering team and young people. Financial arrangements are in place so that young people can stay in placement after their 18th birthday.

The service pays carers above the recommended Government rates for carers through the skills based payment scheme, and no carers complained about the payments or arrangements for allowances.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose has been revised and sets out clearly what the service does. The service has started some consultation work with young people about the information they want to supply to young people who are in foster care, which included updating the children's guide. An interim children's guide was produced during the inspection, which is of good quality and provides appropriate information for young people, and includes some of the work undertaken as part of the consultation.

The service is well managed. The service manager and fostering manager, both have extensive relevant social care experience and appropriate qualifications. They are committed to continuous improvement of the service and outcomes for children. The Life Chances Team monitor outcomes for children, and co-ordinate the additional resources available in conjunction with the placing social workers.

The staff are well supported and have good access to regular supervision, training and personal development. The case loads are manageable and appropriate policies and procedures are in place. All staff have appropriate qualifications and are well experienced. The staff are well known to the carers and are knowledgeable about them and the young people placed.

The service has appointed a recruitment officer who is also responsible for the retention of existing carers. There is an extensive recruitment strategy in place and the recruitment materials are appropriate and interesting.

The service has continued to recruit carers and has made steady progress over the last 12 months. This has improved the choice for carers when making matches. The format of the assessments has been amended, and there is now a clearer distinction between assessments of mainstream carers and friends and family. The standard of assessments remains good and appropriate systems are in place to monitor quality prior to presentation at panel.

All carers are very satisfied with the level of support they receive from the fostering team. This includes regular supervision, support groups, extensive training programme and out of hours telephone calls. Some carers are critical of the support they receive from placing social workers, and in particular the frequency of contact between social workers and the young people.

The arrangements for the annual review of carers includes the collation of a range of information and the compilation of a report, which goes to the panel for initial reviews, which is appropriate. First reviews are competency based using the information from the initial year of fostering. However, the views of the children in place is not consistently clear in every review report, and relies too much on the placing social worker speaking to the child prior to the review.

The records held by the fostering team, for the carers, young people are well ordered, comprehensive and securely stored. The carer's files contain a range of information from the initial contact to the department through to the latest supervision and annual review report.

Some of the files held by the placing social workers are not as extensive, and on some it was not clear when the children had receive their statutory visits. However, the fostering staff ensure that they visit young people in place and they are known to them.

The administrative records and processes are good and well known to the staff. All records are up to date and securely stored. The fostering team is supported by a competent and reliable administrator, who is knowledgeable about the carers and young people placed.

The arrangements for friends and family carers are good. The assessments are detailed and appropriate and include a viability assessment which goes to panel. The carers are afforded the same level of support and access to training and staff take into account the existing relationships and family structures in assessing and supporting the carers.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the panel is conducted in such a way that panel members can ask all the pertinent questions required in all matters presented to them (NMS 30.5)
- ensure that children's views are clearly stated in the foster carer's reviews (NMS 11.3)

- ensure that social worker's visits to young people are clearly identified in the file. (NMS 24.1)