

City of Bradford MDC 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

Bradford Metropolitan District Council fostering service is based on the outskirts of the city of Bradford. The authority covers a large geographical area and provides a range of services to children and young people who are looked after by the local authority (LA). The fostering service aims to promote and maintain stability, safety and security for children and young people in the care system and works closely with childcare teams and other professionals to improve outcomes for children and young people in its care.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The purpose of this visit was to undertake a key announced inspection. Five outcomes were inspected: Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Organisation. Key National Minimum Standards (NMS) are met and the service has several strengths and areas of good and outstanding practice. There are no significant weaknesses relating to health and safety issues. Procedures are in place that make sure that children and young people are protected and kept safe from abuse. Children and young people are frequently consulted and their views make a difference. The staff team have experience as well as relevant training in working with foster carers and children and young people in care. There is good management oversight into how the service is performing and there are monitoring systems in place to improve the quality of care that children and young people receive.

Improvements since the last inspection

Good practice recommendations were made at the last inspection regarding matching documentation, staffing levels and the recording of information relating to children and young people excluded from school. Evidence from this inspection demonstrates that these recommendations have in the majority of cases been met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The general health, development and well-being of children and young people is underpinned by a consistently well-managed process that assesses their health needs, supports foster carers to meet these needs and promptly identifies where specialist services are required.

For example, health assessments are undertaken at an early stage of admission to the service and the majority of children and young people receive annual health assessments thereafter. Registration with primary health care services is routine, and efficient and effective planning and tracking systems means children and young people receive the necessary immunisations when they are due.

The fostering service takes a broad and effective approach to health promotion. Developing a sensible attitude to eating and diet is one example of this, and foster carers ensure that children and young people have an understanding about eating well and maintaining a proper diet. For example, foster carers and looked after children (LAC) and young people can jointly attend healthy eating cooking courses. One young person commented that, 'My carer always talks to me about being healthy and what foods are good for me' and another that, 'I have lost weight and become healthy'. This helps to promote the health and well being of children and young people in the short term and equips them with information to help them make healthy choices in future.

In addition to providing information, support and training on topics such as sexual health and drugs, there are other highly creative approaches to health promotion and services combine well to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities in this respect. For example, the leisure service runs a 'Swimming made easier' course which is made available specifically to all LAC and young people including those with a disability. The emotional health and well-being of children and young people is also promoted, with the service providing opportunities for them to engage and participate in a wide variety of sports and leisure activities such as football, fishing and a music group.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The fostering service is managed by suitably qualified and experienced managers who ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people remains central to all operations. For example, thorough assessment, vetting and scrutiny ensures that only those with the capacity to provide safe, healthy and nurturing environments are approved as foster carers. One carer stated that this process had been 'very thorough and it helped me to reflect whether or not I wanted to do it or not'. Statutory checks and good practice in recruitment ensures that only those assessed as being suitable to work with children and young people are employed by the service.

The effective operation of fostering panel means that the welfare of children and young people is safeguarded and protected. Prospective foster carers have the opportunity of attending fostering panel and social workers are available to provide further information and clarification on assessments presented. After the fullest consideration, the fostering panel makes recommendations to the agency decision-maker who makes the final approval. The quality of assessments is good with

attention paid to how issues of equality and diversity are to be addressed. Panel minutes, in general, accurately record proceedings.

Once approved, the fostering service confirms that high standards are being maintained by foster carers through supervision and support, training opportunities, unannounced visits and annual reviews. Supervision of carers focuses on the safety and development of children and young people in placement. The fostering service ensures that children and young people live in a safe environment through annual home safety checks and ensuring, for example, that appropriate car seats are fitted for children.

Where necessary, the fostering service provides support for those carers who need additional help, and takes action so that those who are no longer suitable to act as carers are prevented from fostering. This ensures that children and young are protected from poor or dangerous practice.

Comprehensive assessments and effective care planning and matching means that the majority of children and young people enjoy stable and secure placements. Children and young people also benefit from additional safeguards, such as risk assessments, monitoring visits from placing social workers and fostering social workers and access to advocacy and children's rights schemes.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people benefit from receiving services that value diversity and promote equality. There is excellent practice with regard to valuing diversity with social inclusion integrated into all outcomes set for children and young people. The short term break service for children and young people with disability, for example, is quoted in national literature as an example of good practice and there are strategies to recruit carers who reflect the ethnicity and culture of all children and young people fostered.

Enjoying and achieving is seen as important in both service strategy and day to day management. Children and young people participate in a range of extra-curricular activities and are offered the opportunity to engage in a wide range of cultural and leisure activities, helped by access to leisure facilities, which is free or at a reduced cost. These opportunities help children and young people to develop positive self-esteem as well as equipping them with new skills and interests.

Children and young people, whatever their level of attainment, have their educational needs recognised and addressed. They are encouraged and supported to do well at school or college and reach their potential. To achieve this, excellent support is available for children and young people through a dedicated educational support team and training is provided for foster carers on educational matters.

There is an expectation that carers will attend parents evenings and provide an

environment that is conducive to study. One young person commented, 'I have a computer to work on and get extra help with my English and Maths'. Young people who are performing particularly well at school are targeted and offered assistance in preparing for examinations and are encouraged to apply for degree-level and other higher and further education courses. Where areas for development in the service are identified, recent research and good practice documentation helps to inform the process for improvement.

Specific short term break services are provided for children and young people with disability. This ensures they receive expert care and support from carers who recognise that parents remain central to the promotion of health and educational needs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has an excellent participation strategy for the full and active involvement of children and young people at every level so that their contributions are fully integrated into service policy, planning and delivery. Specific consultation exercises undertaken with, for example, the Director of Children Services regularly attending face to face meetings with children and young people. The views of children and young people are, however, also sought on a frequent and routine basis on matters such as who should attend reviews, or when contact is being arranged. As well as reinforcing a sense of self-confidence, this enables children and young people to feel respected and valued by the service.

Contact with family and significant others is encouraged, which helps children and young people to develop an understanding of self and sense of belonging. Contact is organised in a way that enables them to feel safe and, where older children are concerned, to exercise an element of choice and control. For example, the wishes and feelings of children and young people are consistently taken into account when contact is being arranged, and one young person stated, 'they listened to me about how and when I wanted contact to take place'.

Risk assessments are in place which indicate the level of supervision required, if any, during contact visits. Foster carers are very well supported and provided with training on how to manage contact arrangements. They are expected to report on how contact arrangements are progressing, the impact on the child and the quality of contact. This ensures that children and young people are safeguarded by carers who have an understanding of the implications and effects of contact on the child.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Bradford Fostering is a well-managed service which provides children and young people with good quality care, improved outcomes and robust safeguarding. The service is led by respected and authoritative management who deliver highly effective services of consistently good standard. Several areas of provision, such as shared care and support care, have been commended in good practice guides and there is awareness and recognition among managers of what the service does well, and where development is required.

The management, staff and service culture is open and inclusive. This is demonstrated by the ways in which it addresses, for example, feedback and complaints, equality and diversity and the individual needs of children and young people. Managers are visible and available to children and young people and they take active steps to ensure that they get direct feedback from those who use the service.

Staffing levels are adequate to maintain the smooth running of the service and to fulfil the Statement of Purpose. Staff are equipped with the skills, competence and understanding required for the task of working with a range of foster carers. Staff are well supported through training and supervision and they possess expert knowledge about the experience of children and young people in care. This in turn enables them to support carers in providing environments where children and young people can develop and flourish.

There are occasional gaps in the recording and documentation of both children's and young people's files and other administrative records. For example, information on individual children is sometimes conflated with that of their siblings, and the recommendations of fostering panel are not always recorded. However, the majority of records kept on children and young people are accurate and up to date. There is good recording on the majority of electronic files and these contain all significant information required by these regulations. This enables children and young people, should they wish to access their records, to have a clear understanding of their journey through the care system.

Wherever possible, the fostering service seeks to maintain the child or young person within their own family or friendship circle. This gives them the opportunity to receive care from those who are already known and familiar to them and helps to promote a sense of identity and belonging. Although there are sometimes delays in assessing friends and families carers within recommended timescales, the majority of children and young people benefit because family and friends carers are assessed to the same standards, their carers supported in the same way, and expectations for improved outcomes are the same as for mainstream carers.