

East Riding of Yorkshire Council 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

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council operates its fostering services from its main office in Beverley. Its aim is to provide a wide range of foster carers so that children and young people can have a choice of placement and access to consistent care. The fostering team is responsible for assessments and approvals, foster care training programmes and the supervision of carers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection which involved an assessment of the performance of the Local Authority's fostering service against all key standards.

The East Riding of Yorkshire fostering service is well managed and child-focussed. The service provides very positive outcomes for young people placed in its care. There is a strong strategy for the recruitment and retention of carers and the service has developed a very effective matching process. The service provides skilled and motivated carers who are well supported by the fostering team. A particular strength of the service is its commitment to enabling young people to contribute their views.

Improvements since the last inspection

The East Riding of Yorkshire has taken action to comply with recommendations made in the last inspection report. A profile of each foster family has been developed to assist young people in the matching process. It has improved the way it seeks the views of young people, ensuring that they can contribute to the way in which the service is run. The service has moved to new office accommodation which has provided additional space and has helped establish a closer working relationship with the adoption service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people's health needs are identified via a statutory medical assessment and a record of this is maintained on their individual files. The service is exploring ways in which health assessments can be shared with carers. There are health care plans in place for all young people and health care issues are discussed at each supervision session with carers. This ensures that the health care needs of each young person are under regular review.

The service is strongly committed to improving health outcomes for children and young people through the development of effective working relationships with partner agencies. It has established good links with the Looked After Children's nurse and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. All young people are registered with primary healthcare services.

The service provides a comprehensive pre and post approval training programme which equips carers with the basic health training they require. There are regular articles on health issues and healthy lifestyles in the foster carers' news magazine which carers find very helpful. There is information available for carers and young people regarding substance misuse and sexual health. The service intends to work with colleagues in health to ensure that awareness of these issues remains high.

Carers and young people have a good understanding of health care issues particularly in relation to healthy eating and lifestyle choices.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The East Riding of Yorkshire fostering service is run by a well qualified and experienced team. The fostering social workers have extensive experience in fostering and working with children. The organisation carries out rigorous checks on all prospective staff prior to appointment. This means that the agency has minimised the risks of young people coming into contact with unsafe adults.

The assessment of carers is rigorous and all appropriate checks are carried out. All aspects of staying safe are well covered in 'Skills to Foster' and 'Core Skills Training'. The service has developed high quality safer caring plans and carers have a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities in protecting children and young people from harm. They understand their health and safety responsibilities and provide children and young people with safe accommodation.

The matching process is a strength of the service. It has recruited carers with a wide range of skills and experience and is able to make placements based on this information. The development of carer profiles and a successful recruitment drive has ensured that young people are given some choice in deciding who looks after them. The service is committed to making positive placements to ensure good outcomes for young people.

The needs of carers' own children are also taken into account.

There is a properly constituted fostering panel and meetings are quorate. Panel meetings are thorough and all members contribute their views in a reflective way. The panel provides feedback to the agency which contributes to its quality monitoring programmes. The work of the panel is held in high regard by the local authority and it carries out its business efficiently and effectively. The panel maintains clear written records of its decisions.

The service has very strong processes to ensure that young people are safe from abuse. The child protection procedures are widely available. Carers have completed safeguarding training and have a good understanding of issues of abuse and neglect. Carers are very confident about reporting concerns and have a good understanding about issues of confidentiality. The safeguarding board provides training and is open and accessible for advice and guidance. The service is rigorous in its investigation of allegations and concerns and maintains very good records of these incidents.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service has developed good policies and procedures relating to diversity and equality. The population of the East Riding of Yorkshire is predominantly White British and this is reflected in the profile of carers and Looked After Children. There are few young people who have needs associated with different culture, ethnicity or religion. There are a growing number of unaccompanied asylum seekers who require care and the service has made considerable efforts to match them carefully and to establish contact with community leaders. Carers and fostering staff have undertaken training in diversity and equality. The case records for young people reflect their individuality.

The fostering service places a high priority on meeting the educational needs of each child and young person in placement. Carers have done some excellent work in encouraging children and young people to achieve their academic potential. In addition, the fostering service has developed a number of imaginative initiatives to support children and young people who are finding reintegration difficult and all initiatives are underpinned by highly effective multi agency working. The authority has established a Looked After Children Group which has worked hard to identify young people at risk of exclusion and there are two Education Programme Workers specifically for Looked After Children. A successful Home School Support Service has been initiated which has impacted positively on school attendance figures.

Children and young people are provided with a range of accessible and enjoyable leisure activities which reflect their own interests and abilities. Some events are arranged specifically for young people in foster families, such as the annual Christmas party and the summer event.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The service actively promotes contact between young people and their birth families where this is appropriate. It is a key aspect of placement matching and is an issue that is regularly considered during supervision visits. There is some excellent practice within the authority which demonstrates that carers fully support and promote contact. For example, some foster carers are willing to take responsibility for

supervised contact, some regularly send photographs to parents, and all encourage young people to keep in touch by telephone, letter, and email. Carers are aware of restricted contacts and take necessary safeguarding precautions. Complaints about contact from young people are responded to well.

Young people are actively encouraged and supported to have a say. Young people feel listened to by foster carers and strongly express the view that they are part of the family. There are effective systems in place for young people to contribute to their reviews. They can use electronic feedback through 'Viewpoint' which is supported by the children's rights service. Independent Reviewing Officers are proactive in providing individual contact with young people to ensure their views are properly represented.

There is a strong and well established children's rights participation team. They have a clearly defined role in ensuring that young people are engaged in the way in which Looked After Children are cared for. This group has participated in interviews for new staff and were actively involved in the appointment of the current resource manager. They meet with the resource manager and head of service to affect change and also attend the council's corporate parenting meetings. They are actively involved in providing training and advice for potential foster carers.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The service has a clear Statement of Purpose which accurately reflects provision. The fostering service benefits from strong leadership by well qualified and experienced managers who are highly child-focussed in their approach. The service has experienced a number of changes in its direct line management in the last two years. However, the resource manager and fostering manager have established stability and are developing an overall strategy to enhance the fostering service.

The staff work in a very supportive team that has access to good training programmes. They feel that the manager is accessible and that they receive advice and guidance as needed. Supervision is not carried out at the required intervals. This hinders the team in discussing their developmental needs and casework issues on a formal basis. The team has access to good in-house training programmes but external training is limited. This restricts the staff team in sharing ideas with colleagues from other agencies and keeping up with best practice.

The fostering team has the skills needed to recruit, assess, approve and support a diverse range of foster carers. They have undertaken a considerable amount of

recruitment work which has increased the range of available fostering placements. The quality of work produced by the team has increased but this has put a strain on resources. The team currently is working to capacity.

The support offered to carers is excellent and makes a significant contribution to the stability of placements. Carers report that they can always contact a member of staff for advice and guidance. The monitoring processes for carers are clear and include regular reviews of strengths and areas for development. Carers are provided with training which equips them with the expertise and practical advice they need for their role. The 'priority care' scheme which enables carers to attend training events has been suspended but there are plans to introduce a similar, streamlined service in the near future.

The quality of case recording is of a high standard.

The service has moved to new office accommodation which has provided additional space and has helped establish a closer working relationship with the adoption service.

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):

- carry out formal, recorded supervision of all staff (NMS 16)
- provide access to a range of training course (NMS 19).