

# Kirklees MC family Placement Services

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**

Kirklees Metropolitan Council operates its fostering services from its office in Mirfield. It provides long and short term placements and has a short breaks service. Friends and family carers are also assessed and supported. The fostering team is responsible for approvals, foster care training programmes and the formal supervision of carers.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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.

Kirklees fostering service is managed to a high standard. It provides very positive outcomes for young people placed in its care and there is a strong emphasis on the work being child centred. There is very effective matching process and there are excellent systems in place to ensure that young people can contribute their views. The service provides skilled and motivated carers who are well supported by the fostering team.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Kirklees fostering service has improved the way in which it consults young people. There is now a wide range of materials to ascertain young people's views prior to reviews and there are a number of effective forums for young people to comment on the quality of service they receive.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

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 looked after children nurses provide strong support and advice on a wide range of health care issues. 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 Child and Adolescent Mental

Health Service and all young people are offered mental health screening. There is access to specialist advice on such issues as drug and alcohol use and sexual health. All young people are registered with primary healthcare services.

The service provides a comprehensive pre and post approval training programme which equips carers with an excellent grounding in health care. Where necessary, external training is provided on specialist health care topics. As a result, there has been a marked reduction in the numbers of young people with complex health care needs requiring care in hospital.

Carers are very well informed and have a good understanding of health care issues, particularly in relation to healthy eating and lifestyle choices. They understand the emotional needs of young people and have benefited from training in attachment, separation and loss. Overall, they are actively supported in meeting the health care needs of young people.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The Kirklees fostering service is run by a well qualified and experienced team. The fostering social workers have extensive experience in fostering and social work with children. The organisation carries out rigorous checks on all 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 pre and post approval training. Child protection training is mandatory for all foster carers. The service has developed high quality safer caring plans which strongly reflect the individual circumstances of carers and young people. 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.

All allegations made against foster carers are thoroughly investigated. An independent agency has been engaged to provide carers with support through this process.

The matching process works very well and there is good evidence to indicate a low number of disrupted placements. Carers have a wide range of skills and experience and the service is able to make placements based on this information. All long term placements are scrutinised by panel. Young people are provided with a choice of placements and are encouraged to express their views. There is a strong emphasis on matches meeting the cultural and ethnic needs of young people.

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 is very effective in providing feedback to the fostering service on the quality of assessments and reports. This makes a significant contribution to the service's 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.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service is committed to ensuring that it meets the individual needs of young people. There is a strong policy statement relating to equality and diversity and its principles underpin key areas of work such as the matching process and care planning. Other initiatives include the formation of Asian carers and male carers support groups. Carers are proactive in ensuring that young people's religious and cultural needs are met.

The educational needs of young people are being met. Many carers are confident about working directly with schools to ensure that young people receive appropriate educational provision. They are supported by the ELAC (Education for Looked After Children) team and have been provided with copies of personal education plans. The ELAC team is working at capacity and is currently concentrating on assisting young people at Key Stage 1.

Children and young people are provided with a range of accessible and enjoyable leisure activities which reflect their own interests and abilities.

### **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. There are written contact agreements and carers are aware of the importance of contact.

Young people are actively encouraged and supported to have a say. The fostering service has worked collaboratively with Voice and the National Children's Bureau to implement 'Blueprint' which is a project to introduce a child centred approach to young people in care. One exceptional result is the introduction of new review documentation which is very effective in ascertaining the views of young people. Young people have also been enabled to produce their own magazine and can comment on the council's corporate parenting strategy. There is a strong lead from

members of the council in promoting consultation with young people.

A survey of young people in foster care was carried out in July 2008 by Kirklees children's rights and there is clear evidence to show that the authority has listened to the views of young people and responded to the recommendations in the survey report.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The service has an excellent Statement of Purpose which accurately reflects provision and sets out the value base. The fostering service benefits from strong leadership by well qualified and experienced managers who are highly child oriented in their approach. 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 support as needed.

The fostering team has the skills needed to recruit, assess, approve and support a diverse range of foster carers. There are sufficient numbers of staff at present but senior managers recognise that the team is working to capacity. The burden of work has increased considerably in the last two years and the numbers of looked after children have risen sharply.

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 in line with every child matters outcomes. Carers are provided with training which equips them with the expertise and practical advice they need for their role.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The fostering service is committed to meeting the unique needs of young people and their individuality is reflected in the assessment process and care planning.