

Newcastle Fostering Unit, Children's Social Care

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC041538
Inspection date	22/05/2009
Inspector	Stephen Graham / Stephen Smith
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Children's Services Directorate, Springfield Road, Blakelaw, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE5 3DS
Telephone number	0191 211 6307
Email	paul.chadwick@newcastle.gov.uk
Registered person	Newcastle City Council
Registered manager	Michael Foy Dack
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	11/06/2007

© Crown copyright 2009

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

Newcastle Fostering Service is known as 'Foster a Future' and is based at the Sheriff Leas Office in Blakelaw, Newcastle upon Tyne. The service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs, including long term foster care and short-term placements. The service also provides foster carers for young people with disabilities within a shared care scheme and supports a growing number of family and friends foster carers. At the time of the inspection the service was supporting approximately 200 foster carers with around 250 children in placements. The service has a staff team of experienced social workers responsible for supervising and assessing foster carers, working alongside experienced administrative staff. The manager is supported by two deputy managers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The service has continued to work hard to further improve the overall quality of support it provides to fostered children and their carers. It is good at working in partnership with a range of professionals to promote the health and educational needs of fostered children.

By recruiting more new foster carers and assessing and training them thoroughly, the service has continued to improve the choice of placements available to children and their social workers. The arrangements made to match children with the right foster carers are good. The service works in partnership with social workers who wish to place children, to ensure that carers get good information about the child they are going to foster. This means that placements made are less likely to break down. The number of emergency foster placements the service previously needed to make has also reduced.

The quality of the work undertaken by foster carers with the children placed with them is reviewed regularly. The views of children are gathered and assessed as part of this process. They are also regularly asked for their views on how effective the service is in ensuring that their care needs are being met. Foster carers are encouraged to undertake regular training to ensure that they continue to have the skills necessary to care for young people successfully.

The electronic recording systems introduced by the local authority allow social workers to access full information about the children cared for as they need it. Good systems allow them to share necessary information with carers and other professionals to improve joint working and overall outcomes for children and young

people.

Children said good things about their foster carers, one told us 'I am happy in my foster placement and have no issues.'

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection statutory requirements were made in respect of the arrangements to monitor any accidents occurring to children, the assessment of new carers, the provision of necessary training, recording and maintenance of documents, the arrangements to review the work of foster carers and to consult with children about this. The service has taken action with each of these matters and has improved the overall outcomes for children and young people placed through it.

Additional good practice recommendations were made relating to the training, supervision and management of foster carers as well as overall recruitment of new carers to the service. Again, action has also been taken by the service to address each of these recommendations and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people benefit from good health care services that meet their overall physical, emotional and social developmental needs. Social workers who have placed children through the service give lots of good examples of how the service works with it's carers to ensure that children and young people keep themselves healthy. Examples of how they do this include carers adhering to specific diets, ensuring that health appointments are kept and maintaining good communication generally regarding health issues. Some social workers describe the very well organised arrangements put in place to make sure that necessary medical treatments or health care requiring specialist skills or equipment are properly organised and supported. Some also described access to specialist advice and additional training where this is necessary to help carers meet children's particular needs.

Foster carers receive full details of the health needs of children in advance and also receive additional training and specialist support where necessary. Carers know their role in registering the children with doctors, dentists and opticians and work closely with a variety of specialist medical staff to promote and support good outcomes for the children and young people placed with them.

The questionnaires received from young people are very positive. All of these children feel that they are receiving support and advice regarding their own health needs from their foster carers. One wrote how 'I always take part in outside activities and eat sensibly'. Children spoken with also gave very good examples of how they are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle through involvement in activities such as sports and dance. They also confirmed that they are encouraged to eat healthily

and to be involved in shopping, planning menus and to help with preparing food when they are older.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

To help keep children safe, suitability checks are undertaken on carers and staff. These are monitored through a central system to make sure that they are kept up to date. The recording of the checks completed are not always sufficiently detailed and not all of the staff files include a recent photograph.

Health and safety checklists are used to help ensure that homes are safe places for children to live. These comprehensively cover the overall risks for young people but in some examples, require more specific detail of the checks undertaken. Family safe care agreements are also used to help keep children safe. These are supplemented by individual risk assessments which are agreed and updated in partnership with children's social workers.

The systems used to match children with carers are generally effective. The documentation used to gather and share the information needed to properly match children with their carers has been further improved. It is used effectively to gather all necessary information and record it fully. Placement agreement meetings to formally agree and record care arrangements for the children are generally prompt. Positively, there are now fewer unplanned endings of placements. Discussion with foster carers and the children placed, also help to confirm the effectiveness of the matching procedures in use and the good outcomes they provide for children.

All of the children who wrote in confirmed that they are well cared for where they are living now. Some gave examples of why they felt this was true. One described how 'we are like a proper family'. Another described how 'I love my foster family and we are happy'.

There are good arrangements in place at the service which safeguard children and young people and protect them from abuse. All carers are provided with training to help them keep children safe. Managers at the service have systems in place to allow them to monitor and respond to any referrals and incidents, but these records are not presented in a way which supports good overall monitoring and in some examples need more detail to confirm that they have been monitored. One young person wrote, 'I used to get bullied but now everything is ok because the school and my carers sorted it out'.

The discussions held with young people and the questionnaires received from them are positive, they feel that they are protected and can speak to someone if they are unhappy. One young person wrote that 'I have a complaints leaflet'.

The fostering panel ensures that the assessments undertaken on any new foster carers are thorough and that their ability to care safely for children is regularly

reviewed. Panel members receive some training to help them with their responsibilities, but are sometimes unsure if enough members are present to allow business to proceed. Members are not always asked to formally declare any possible conflicts of interest when undertaking panel business. Panel minutes do not always demonstrate the thoroughness of discussions held when concerns have arisen during the assessment of carers. Detailed references for new carers are obtained but do not always meet the full requirements of the regulations.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service values and promotes diversity and equality for children and young people. Foster carers and fostering staff receive training in dealing with diversity issues. Carers describe the support received with these issues as good. Children receive good support from their carers to help them access and use activities in the community. Consents are obtained and risk assessments are completed to allow young people to participate safely in a range of recreational activities.

The service provides good support to its carers and helps facilitate good links with a range of professionals to ensure that the educational needs of children and young people are prioritised and supported. Examples of support provided include access to computers to help young people with their homework. They are also helped through good individual access to specialist tutors, for example in literacy and numeracy where this is of benefit to them. Carers have access to training to help them understand and support the educational needs of children in their care. Each child who wrote to us or spoke with us confirmed that they always get the right help with their education. One young person described how 'I like school and would ask for help if I was unsure of anything'.

The policies and agreed procedures put in place by the service ensure that during short-term breaks in foster care, the parents of the children placed continue to be recognised as their main carers. There are good arrangements in place to ensure that necessary information is shared and that specialist equipment, when needed, is provided.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The service works in close partnership with placing social workers using the agreed policies and procedures to promote and monitor contact arrangements for each child or young person. The contact arrangements made are agreed with foster carers in advance and are recorded. Carers also record the detail of each contact as it occurs and share this with the children's own social worker. Help and advice is provided promptly to carers should any concerns arise around the arrangements in place.

The service has good arrangements in place to ensure that children are regularly

consulted with and are able to raise and discuss any concerns they have regarding the care they receive. There is a well organised participation group for children which meets regularly and contributes its views on a range of issues which impact on the quality of care received by looked after children in Newcastle. The group is well supported by the staff specifically employed by the service to do so.

All of the children who wrote to us feel that their carers listen to them and take notice of their opinions. One young person told us 'we discuss any issues openly and honestly'. Children also know who to speak to if they are unhappy, and all know how to complain formally if necessary. One young person described how 'I can speak to my social worker or my complaints co-ordinator, a teacher or my carers'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Foster carers receive support in preparing young people for independence. Policies and procedures are provided within the Foster Carer's Handbook.

Information regarding the independent skills that young people have and what they like to practice is gathered and recorded by their foster carers and social workers. Young people receive the advice and support that they need. They described how they are encouraged to budget well and to save their money. Some described how they are helped to develop their independence skills, by going to cookery classes for example.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose describes generally the aims and objectives of the service. It is reviewed regularly, but does not include all of the information described in the national standards for fostering services. Placing social workers and foster carers can access a copy of the statement on request. Children and young people are also given their own guide to it. Children themselves have helped to update this, making it clearer to follow and easier to use. The guide is very well presented.

The management arrangements within the service are well organised and effective. Managers monitor the service as a matter of routine, however the system used to record this does not fully demonstrate the regularity of the monitoring. The administrative support is well organised and is provided by very experienced staff. Systems are in place to ensure that carer reviews are completed to schedule and that initial applications are processed efficiently.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The guidance and training provided to carers and staff working for the service helps to ensure this.

The processes to check on and train new carers are generally effective with records

of the assessments undertaken completed in good detail. Carers give good examples of why they choose to foster for this service, a number highlighting positively their own experience of the skills and competence of fostering and social work staff they had met.

Regular supervision visits, including occasional un-announced visits, are undertaken by fostering staff to help ensure that their carers are supported effectively. Detailed records of these visits are maintained within files for reference. Carers are complimentary about the good support provided to them in caring for children. One told us that the 'child's social worker is excellent, great support, always accessible, visits very regularly'. A number of carers highlight access to support through their supervising social worker and training as strengths of the service.

The annual review meetings for each foster carer are scheduled in advance and are monitored to ensure they take place at the required frequency. The documentation used for reviews demonstrates clearly that necessary checks for carers are monitored and updated as a matter of routine. Review reports describe in detail the individual ability of each carer to provide good standards of care to children placed with them. Good communication exists between social workers placing children through the fostering service and the staff at the service itself.

Carers are encouraged to participate in regular training to help them meet the needs of children placed with them. A number of events are organised to encourage joint training for carers and staff. Nominated staff take key responsibility for foster carer training and work to arrange and publicise events well in advance to encourage good levels of participation. Some training is mandatory and attendance is monitored. The individual training needs of each carer are discussed and agreed regularly in their own supervision and annual review meetings.

Case files for children are generally well presented and contain comprehensive information. The electronic recording systems introduced by the service have improved the ability of fostering staff and social workers to share information effectively and provide better outcomes for young people placed with foster carers. Managers regularly audit files to ensure that they are accurate and include all required information. The administrative systems for the service are generally well organised and are monitored regularly by the manager.

The service has good policies and procedures to encourage, assess and approve family and friends as foster carers. Their support and training needs are met in the same way as for any other carer.

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
15	ensure that the suitability checks undertaken on staff are sufficiently detailed and that all required information is obtained (Regulation 20)	31/07/2009
30	ensure that the references obtained for new carers meet the full requirements of the regulations (Regulation 27).	31/07/2009

Recommendations

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

- improve the health and safety checklists used to include more specific detail of all the checks undertaken (NMS 6)
- ensure that the systems and records used by managers to monitor the safety of young people clearly demonstrate the regularity of monitoring and are fully completed (NMS 9)
- ensure that when the fostering panel meets it has access to clear written policies and procedures to help it work efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)
- ensure that the Statement of Purpose for the service includes all of the information described in the national standards for fostering services (NMS 1).