

Fostering Services Rotherham

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

Rotherham Borough Council provides a fostering service to looked after children. The service has carers providing short or emergency care, long term care, short breaks to children with disabilities and their families, and carers providing care to family members or close friends. The service recruits, assesses and supports carers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced key inspection and all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) were reviewed. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Since the last full inspection in May 2008 and an interim in January 2009 this service has made and continues to make good progress on improving the service. The service has some strengths and these are, in particular, the support it provides to carers, the Children's Rights Service and the leaving care service. The most significant improvements have been in the recruitment and assessment of new carers, the education of looked after children and addressing the very significant problem of placing too many children with carers. The service has been subject to scrutiny from elected members, the Chief Executive of Rotherham Borough Council and other senior managers, and the service has benefited from additional resources. However, some areas remain which require further improvement, although in all areas action plans or development proposals are in hand. All of the areas are linked to the monitoring and controlling systems, which although developed are not working effectively enough to identify some deficiencies in the panel process, the placement of children with friends and family or placed under Regulation 38 in an emergency. Although a policy on recording is in place carers are not always following this and are not subject to sufficient scrutiny. The placement agreement does not entirely fit with the Regulation. The council has a significant number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies, but the procedures for placing children and the quality assurance systems are not as well developed as they are for children placed with Rotherham carers.

Improvements since the last inspection

The service has continued to make good progress in a number of areas. The service is aware of the remaining areas of weakness and plans are in hand to address these.

The subject of dealing with exemptions to go over the fostering limit has been addressed and although some work remains outstanding, clear plans are in hand to deal with this within appropriate timescales. Carers who are looking after more than three children are subject to additional visits and practical support.

New systems have been put in place to identify when a Criminal Record Bureau disclosure is required for carers and adult members of fostering households. No deficiencies were found at this inspection.

All holiday accommodation which is owned by carers and used for a significant amount of time has been risk assessed by a member of staff. New procedures are in place to ensure that young people are being visited when away for long periods of time, more than three weeks, and contact arrangements are maintained.

The risk assessments have been updated and are now more robust and contain a range of matters including risk management strategies for carers to ensure that children are kept as safe as possible.

The monitoring systems in place have been improved. However, some deficiencies were found at this inspection and a new recommendation has been made.

The staff have undertaken additional training including the role of the supervising social worker which was delivered by the British Association of Fostering and Adoption. This has helped staff and the arrangements for the supervising of carers has improved with a focus on looking at, in particular, the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The service promotes the health and well-being of the young people placed. A good number of young people have had health care assessments and health care plans are written, which are considered at the statutory reviews. However, carers do not receive copies of these plans so they are unaware of the recommendations made and any actions which they need to carry out.

Carers have received training in first aid and attachment, which they value, and some have taken part in the Ministry of Food campaign by Jamie Oliver to encourage healthier eating. Carers are aware of young people's specific dietary needs relating to their faith and culture. These are being met and additional information and advice is available to carers.

Carers know of the health care needs of the young people and are aware of the various agencies who can provide additional support. Carers and staff value the direct support and advice they receive from the Looked After and Adoption Children's team.

Although it is clear that placement agreements are being completed, carers cannot always demonstrate that they have them and this compromises the level of information they have about health care needs, in particular ensuring that carers have consent to medical treatment for the young people in their care.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The process and procedures for the recruitment and selection of staff and panel members are appropriate. New systems are in place to ensure that carers and adult members of fostering households are appropriately checked. Criminal Record Bureau disclosures are updated within appropriate timescales, and these ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to keep young people safe.

The service provides suitable carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Although some over crowding remains, the service is aware of this. The matter is subject to formal monitoring at senior level and this has included elected members and the Chief Executive of Rotherham Council, and has resulted in additional funding. There are plans to review the overall approval of all carers through the annual review process to ensure that there is room in all foster homes so that children can live there comfortably and receive individual attention from carers to meet their needs. The service has reviewed and implemented new arrangements in respect of health and safety checklists, safe caring policies, bedroom sharing assessments and pet care assessments. These are now robust, are subject to review and carers have copies to assist in the implementation. Since the last inspection the staff have undertaken a risk assessment of all holiday accommodation which is owned by the carers and used extensively by looked after children.

Some deficiencies in matching were identified for in-house placements, mainly in the placement of children with friends and family carers or under Regulation 38, placements made in an emergency. The service is aware of these deficiencies and a detailed action plan with specific timescales to improve practice is in place. Rotherham currently has a significant number of children placed with the Independent Fostering Agencies. The arrangements for matching children placed externally are less well developed, although plans are in hand to develop the contracting process for use of Independent Fostering Agencies. Placement decisions lie in the locality teams and these are not always given to the same level of scrutiny and the quality assurance processes are poor. Placement stability figures indicate that this is improving and fewer children are experiencing placement break down. The placement agreement does not exactly meet the regulation and does not always appear on the young people's files.

All carers have received child protection training and this is enhanced through a newly developed e-learning package. Appropriate action has been taken in respect of allegations made against carers and the systems and processes are now improved to ensure that allegations are dealt with swiftly. The new safe care policies are robust and take into account a range of matters and are reviewed if the situation in a foster home changes, for example, if a new child is placed. Accidents, children being missing from home or incidents of bullying are discussed during carer's supervision.

The panel membership meets the Regulation and the chair is an experienced social work practitioner. Although the panel membership has been strengthened, some areas of decision making remain weak, particularly in relation to the placement of children with friends and family carers and in an emergency. The panel is not able to exercise thoroughly their quality assurance function. However, the service has developed an action plan for improvement which was presented at the time of the inspection. This includes a review of policies and procedures, which are out of date, the appointment of a new panel advisor and a quality assurance process. However, this has not manifested into practice as yet. In particular, the quality of the minutes is poor and they do not always provide an accurate record of the meeting.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service has developed an equality and diversity action plan and good progress is being made. The service has also developed guidance to staff and carers about a range of services, including matching and practical details of caring for young people with additional needs. Carers are undertaking training on equality and diversity and value the experience. The individual needs of the young people are taken into account in the matching process and additional services are sourced where possible.

Since the last inspection the Get Real team who support the education of looked after children has been re-organised and now has different line management arrangements which is leading to a more efficient service. A number of reviews have taken place, including the role of the designated teachers, personal educational allowances, personal education plans and using data to track performance. This has resulted in a more coordinated service and carers and young people feel more supported. The GCSE results from Summer 2008 showed improvement. There are plans in hand to move to the virtual school model which will raise the profile further and allow for further developments. Carers and young people value the work of the team, in particular the additional support in gaining a place at school, help with fixed term exclusions and additional tutoring at the time of tests or GCSEs. Carers have received training outlining how they can support young people in education.

Rotherham provides short breaks to a number of young people and their families through a scheme called Families Together. Currently 33 families are receiving a service which they clearly value and find helpful. One family wrote, 'Our carers are brilliant, they are helpful, teach our child and have patience'. Since the last inspection the carers have received additional training on moving and handling and medication. Files have been audited to ensure that carers have sufficient information about the young people they are caring for. An additional member of staff has been appointed to recruit further carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The service promotes contact arrangements for children and young people well. Contact arrangements are recorded on file and carers and young people are aware of these. Prospective carers are made aware of the need to support contact during their initial training and additional support is provided to manage potentially difficult contact issues. Contact arrangements are reviewed at the statutory review and the carer's annual review.

Rotherham has established a Looked After Children's Council and this has begun work on a range of matters. The magazine produced for young people is informative and attractive giving young people an understanding of the work of the council. The arrangements for statutory reviews are good and the majority of young people attend and their views are actively sought so that they can be taken into account in the decision making process. The consultation documents are attractive and can be completed online and are prepared by the very active Children's Rights Service (CRO). This service provides a range of services and attractive documents to support looked after children, including 'Seeds of Change' which encourages young people to think positively about their education and future. Young people are provided with information on how they can make complaints and these are dealt with through the CRO service and usually dealt with swiftly.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The leaving care service is managed by 'Action for Children' who provide a service to young people through a range of services and continue to support them for as long as this is required. Carers receive training and support to ensure that older young people receive appropriate services. Arrangements are discussed at statutory reviews and the Get Real team has developed a range of initiatives to encourage attendance in higher and further education and employment, and all care leavers are offered driving lessons.

Carers are satisfied with the arrangements for payments and allowances and complaints are dealt with swiftly. Some carers have received additional allowances in the last 12 months for additional bathrooms or extensions to provide additional living space and reduce over crowding.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service has a comprehensive action plan in place and good progress is being made on the actions identified. Carers receive training on equality and diversity and this includes a distance learning

course to encourage carers who find it difficult to attend training away from the home. Good, clear, detailed guidance has been produced to support carers and staff in caring for young people with additional needs and in matching children. Good practice was observed where additional resources had been provided to support a carer looking after a child who had religious and cultural needs. The short break service supports children with disabilities and their families well.

The statement of purpose and children's guide have been revised and provide good clear information for carers, professionals and young people. Both documents meet the Regulations.

Although the monitoring and controlling arrangements have been improved, some weakness remain, for example, thorough reviews of the panel papers prior to their presentation at panel, reviewing the panel minutes and the arrangements for placing children with friends and family carers or placed in an emergency remain deficient. There is evidence of auditing of files by managers to ensure that they contain appropriate information, but this same level of scrutiny is not afforded to all carers, some of whom did not have all the information in good order which they should have.

The service has at present a sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the number of approved carers and assess new carers. They are divided into two teams, each led by one team leader. One team is responsible for recruiting and assessing carers and the other team supports carers post approval. The recruitment team has successfully recruited a significant number of carers and has more assessments in hand. The quality of assessments presented are good and the team has a good understanding of the work that they do and are enthusiastic. The team is working to clear targets and is well supported.

The supervisory team has benefited from additional training and is working to clearer structures and greater understanding across the whole of children's services of their role. All carers commented positively on the support they receive from the fostering team and the range of services available. One carer said, 'We have regular contact with our support worker who is only too willing to follow things up for us'.

Since the last inspection the service has appointed staff responsible for the training of carers and they have established a comprehensive training calendar covering a range of matters. They have audited the carers' records and created an accurate training record for each carer so that this can be evaluated appropriately at the carer's review. The overall attendance at training has significantly improved with almost all carers completing first aid and child protection training in the last 12 months. The training team has also established innovative ways of training for carers, including e-learning and distance learning packages, and has made a good start on implementing the training standards of the Children's Workforce Development Council. Carers value the additional focus on training and the greater accessibility of the sessions.

The service has moved to recording all young people's records on an electronic

system which has benefits and difficulties. The young people's files seem to have most of the appropriate records, although placement agreements do not always appear to be on file. The service has a policy on recording by carers which is not always followed and the monitoring systems have not identified this as a problem. The arrangements for the administration records are good and all records presented were organised and clear.

The arrangements for placing children with friends and family carers or in an emergency under Regulation 38 are weak. However, this is recognised by the service and an action plan and revised policy and procedures have been devised, although not as yet embedded into practice. A new member of staff has been appointed to undertake all assessments of friends and family carers to provide additional support. There is general understanding amongst senior managers that further improvement in practice is required. However, friends and family carers are provided with access to training and support and receive regular visits from staff.

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
8	ensure that placements made under Regulation 38 meet the Regulation and that all placements are reviewed at panel within 6 weeks (Regulation 38.2)	01/08/2009
4	ensure that the service is managed with sufficient care, competence and skill to ensure that the monitoring systems in place are effective (Regulation 8.1.b)	01/08/2009
30	ensure that panel minutes provide an accurate record of the discussion and decisions made (Regulation 25.2).	01/08/2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that carers are provided with health care plans (NMS 12.1)
- ensure that carers have copies of the placement agreements which contain accurate health care information and in particular the arrangements for consent to medical treatment (NMS 12.1)
- review the placement agreement to ensure that when completed it meets the

Regulation and Schedule 6 (NMS 8.4)

- ensure that children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies are given the same level of scrutiny as children placed with Rotherham's carers (NMS 16.7)
- review the arrangements for the recording by carers to ensure that they are following the policy (NMS 24.7).