

# Blackburn with Darwen Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption 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**

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Adoption Service provides, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption services required under current legislation. It recruits, prepares and assesses people who apply to be adoptive parents and makes arrangements for children to be placed with approved adopters. The service also provides, or makes arrangements for, support to people affected by adoption; this includes birth parents, adopted adults and families facing challenges. Due to the geography and population make-up of the authority it often places children with adopters approved by other agencies as well as placing children with adopters approved by the service itself.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced inspection of the adoption service. The purpose of the inspection was to assess its compliance with the adoption National Minimum Standards. All the standards were inspected under the four outcome areas of staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. All areas are judged to be outstanding.

This is an agency that demonstrates a very high level of competence in practice. It has very well developed and clear underpinning policies and procedures and these are implemented effectively in practice. A very strong strategic and operational approach to delivery of services is supported by an outstanding commitment by staff and their managers to children and their welfare. Staff and managers have considerable skill and expertise in adoption work and children's social care. Work is exceedingly well managed and monitored. As a consequence all parties affected by adoption receive services of exceptional quality based on their individual needs.

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

The provider has given a robust attention to meeting every action and recommendation made at the last inspection. This work has contributed to the extremely high quality of the adoption services provided by the authority.

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

The provision is not judged.

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

The provision is outstanding.

This agency shows great commitment to meeting children's needs through adoption. Its careful, thorough and effective approach focuses on meeting children's needs. Strong and clear policies and procedures are implemented in practice by highly skilled staff and managers who show professionalism and flair in their dealings with children, adopters and other professionals. Safeguarding children is of high priority in the agency and a specific, detailed procedure is in place to support this.

The matching process is driven by a commitment to placing children with the most appropriate families. The authority has a clear and formalised process for family finding and considering possible matches. This process ensures that people who know children best are involved in matching decisions. Very good use is made of specialist professional services when preparing children for adoption and proposing potential matches. A significant aspect of the agency's strength is in respect of the importance it places on undertaking direct work with children. The authority's 'Fast Track' team, which provides specialist support to children throughout the adoptive process, is an innovative and creative service that is an outstanding feature of an already strong service. As a consequence there is a clear focus on the needs of children and this promotes the potential for successful placements.

Adoption reports produced are generally of a high standard. This provides potential families and adoption panel with all relevant and necessary information that is clear and well written. Quality monitoring within the agency is of a particularly high standard and ensures that information is of good quality and produced in a timely manner.

The agency is extremely thorough and efficient in the way it recruits, prepares and assesses prospective adopters. The processes from enquiry to approval are well considered, efficient and timely. Adoption social workers implement these processes with professionalism, skill and sensitivity. Assessments are very thorough and applicants receive very good support through the process. Preparation training is of excellent quality and greatly appreciated by adopters. The agency is committed to approving only those people who are suitable to offer homes for children placed for adoption. It is rigorous in checking the suitability and backgrounds of applicants and the systems in place to achieve this are of a very high standard.

The adoption panel is correctly constituted and underpinned by up to date policies and procedures. It undertakes its duties with commitment and care giving close consideration to matters presented to it. Further rigour in the adoption process is provided by the panel's careful scrutiny and quality monitoring of the work of the agency. The panel is well managed, efficiently administered and decisions are made in a timely way. Panel members are carefully recruited and receive an excellent induction to their role on panel. The overall operations of the adoption panel are of a high standard and administrative arrangements are suitable to support its activities.

The managers and staff of the agency are skilled and knowledgeable. Social workers for adopters and children alike are highly motivated. They demonstrate an impressive commitment to improving children's lives through adoption. Staff members are extremely knowledgeable of the agency's procedures and their own commitment leads to a service that constantly strives for excellence and improvement. The manager is qualified and experienced in adoption work; senior staff and workers are similarly qualified with all adoption social workers having completed post qualifying training. Recruitment and selection practices are very thorough with appropriate systems in place to ensure only the most suitable and qualified staff are employed.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The agency's approach to support services is planned, focussed and very strong. The ability to identify support needed in individual cases and work creatively to provide this is excellent and demonstrates the agency's focus on children. Planned ongoing support is readily available and provided with sensitivity to the needs, background and culture of the recipients. Wider authority services are involved in the provision of adoption support where needed. Innovative arrangements are in place to ensure that support is effective, readily accessible and provided promptly. For example, the psychological services that are available bring a very strong extra dimension to supporting adoptive placements. These services are clearly embedded within the adoption service and its policies and procedures and the seamless nature of this integration allows a much more effective support service than is usually the case.

The authority is highly sensitive to the multi-cultural nature of the area it serves and has worked proactively to develop links with different communities to ensure that the support provided is appropriate and acceptable. The agency ensures that all work is based upon the individual needs of adopters and children. It consults very effectively with all parties affected by adoption and the resulting relevance and effectiveness of the service provided is impressive.

There is also first class medical and legal advice to the agency and the adoption panel that ensures all relevant facts are available in all cases, particularly those with a complex dimension.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

This agency has a clear and holistic approach to adoption. This is demonstrated by the provision of high quality services for all people affected by adoption, including birth families.

Birth parents are encouraged to be as involved as possible throughout the planning for their children's futures and to express their views, wishes and feelings. Work with

birth parents is carried out effectively to secure their views about the adoption of their children and to gain information to assist the adoption process. This work is carried out with a sensitivity that provides birth parents and other birth family members with excellent quality support provided in way appropriate and relevant to them. Meetings between birth and adoptive parents are arranged whenever appropriate with high levels of support provided to both parties. Birth parents are able and encouraged to 'pop in' to the adoption service at any time and practical support is offered such as help with writing letters for the letterbox. That these arrangements continue as long as needed demonstrates the commitment to meeting people's needs as well as supporting the adoption process. This development of close and purposeful relationships has the added benefit of supporting the authority's significant commitment to the gathering of information for life-story work and adoption preparation.

Direct work with children and preparing them for their move into adoptive placements is regarded as an essential aspect of adoption work. The authority shows a real commitment to this work. It is innovative and proactive in the way the work is carried out involving specialist professionals from other services where necessary. The integrated and accessible nature of this support helps create stable placements for children.

The development of life-story work and the importance for children to be able to make sense of their circumstances and backgrounds is vigorously pursued by the authority. Life-story work with children is of exceptional quality and the resulting life-story books produced are individualised to the child concerned, attractively presented and informative. Staff members undertake this work with great commitment and understand its importance. Consequently children are helped to understand their move to adoptive parents and receive a book that will be of life-long importance to them. Work is timely to support the adoption process. Letterbox arrangements are very strong with very sensitive, long-term support being provided to all parties for as long as required.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The preparation for this inspection was very efficient and of a very high standard, which demonstrates a commitment and ability to organise and manage well.

The framework within which the agency operates is informed by a very good Statement of Purpose and underpinned by robust and up to date policies, procedures and protocols. Impressively the agency's well developed procedures are clearly

embedded in practice and implemented professionally to great effect. The agency has a children's guide for older and younger children which are acceptable for their purpose. Other information developed by the agency is of exceedingly good quality. For example, the information pack for prospective adopters is very clear, informative and attractively presented. All documentation, policies and procedures demonstrate that the agency's priority is the welfare of children.

The adoption service is impressively well managed at both strategic and operational levels. Managers are highly regarded across children's services. They combine strong strategic and planning ability with very effective operational management. Managers and staff understand well how adoption fits into the authority's wider children's social care provision. The management of the service is creative and insightful and services are delivered with a commitment and energy. This ensures procedures are implemented effectively in practice by professionals who are highly motivated to provide excellent services to children.

Senior managers and the council's executive are kept fully informed of the agency's work. They are committed to providing excellent services and provide very good support for the operation of the agency.

Workload management and support for staff is well organised. There is a clear understanding of how responsibilities are allocated and priorities set and workers are well aware of their roles and those of colleagues. Training and development are promoted and workers have access to a wide range of opportunities to improve skills, understanding and knowledge. All adoption social workers have post-qualifying awards.

Organisational and administrative arrangements are efficient and effective. As such they provided an excellent basis from which the high quality work of the agency is undertaken.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The agency is committed to providing a service that values and supports people's differences. It operates under strong policy and procedural guidance. The authority recruits a diverse range of adopters to meet children's needs. It works proactively with different communities in the area to promote adoption. For example, close work has been undertaken with Islamic scholars to ascertain the needs of Asian heritage children in terms of adoption and to deal with concerns of Asian prospective adopters. Information and preparation groups are culturally sensitive and can be provided in Urdu. The service provides excellent support to birth parents with learning disabilities. Assessments of prospective adopters show a very clear understanding and consideration of religious and cultural issues.

Case recording is very thorough and accurately reflects the work that has been undertaken. Monitoring of work done and records maintained is very effective and this further supports the excellent service delivery. Supervision records clearly show the oversight of managers and record key decisions taken.



Personnel records and those in respect of adoption panel members are maintained to a high standard and demonstrate a clear and robust recruitment process that is adhered to in practice.

The agency operates from well equipped premises that are located centrally within the town. Arrangements for the storage and archiving of records are secure and access arrangements clear. The agency has a very detailed and well developed disaster recovery plan in place setting out contingency plans for how the service will continue to operate in the event of a range of crises.