

# Calderdale Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC042558                   |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 11/11/2009                 |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Sarah Urding / Lynne Busby |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Key                        |

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| <b>Registered person</b>       | Calderdale MBC                                                                                                |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Andrew Walker                                                                                                 |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Vivienne Hobman                                                                                               |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 05/11/2007                                                                                                    |

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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**

Calderdale fostering service provides foster carers who are recruited, trained, assessed, reviewed and supervised by the service and form part of a full range of accommodation for looked after children and young people.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced full inspection. All of the key standards were inspected along with the progress made since the last full inspection in November 2007. Children's good health is promoted because foster carers are well trained and supported by specialist health care professionals. Support for children's emotional wellbeing is outstanding. Children and young people's welfare is promoted because safeguarding frameworks are in place and carers and staff respond promptly to safeguarding concerns. The fostering panel is rigorous and decision making is clear. Children and young people's learning is promoted and there is strength in consultation with them. Foster carers are strong advocates for children and are focused on meeting individual needs. Foster carers are consistently well supported by knowledgeable and experienced staff. They are valued and respected for the task that they do. Recommendations to improve outcomes for children and young people are made in relation to the management of kinship placements; accessibility of transition services; the promotion of equality and diversity and record keeping.

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

The service has made good progress in meeting the recommendations made at the last inspection. Carers have been provided with improved guidance and training particularly in the areas of behaviour management and promoting good health. Children and young people live in safe environments because staff undertake health and safety checks regularly. Carers are now more involved in pathway planning for young people, they advocate strongly on their behalf and are clearer about how to promote skills for independence. The service level agreement for the pathway team is currently under review because it is not fit for purpose. Carers are clear about respecting confidentiality of children and young people but they have still not been provided with lockable storage to keep records secure. This recommendation remains from the previous inspection.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Children and young people's health needs are well met. There are strong partnerships between health professionals, carers and the fostering service which makes health care services accessible for children. Carers are well informed about health care needs because placement meetings are informative, expectations clearly defined and they receive prompt training in relation to providing specialist and complex health care. Carers are very well supported by fostering social workers and health care is monitored in a timely way by looked after children's nurses. This ensures that changing health needs are known about and met.

Emotional needs are particularly well met by the looked after children's health team (LAACH), which provides excellent support for carers and children and promotes placement stability. The service is valued by both staff and carers and multi-agency meetings promote an holistic meeting of children's needs and timely intervention.

Carers advocate strongly on children's behalf in a health arena and promote healthy lifestyles. Carers keep good records of medical appointments and significant incidents. However, placement agreements are not consistently detailed and do not outline clearly how health needs such as epilepsy should be managed nor are there any risk assessments relating to moving and handling. This makes practice less accountable.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people are safeguarded by experienced practitioners and looked after safely by carers who undergo rigorous assessments of suitability.

Carers provide safe, healthy and nurturing environments because they undergo a full assessment of suitability and an ongoing process is in place to ensure that children and young people continue to live in a safe environment. Foster carers have safe caring policies and there is good management of risk in relation to health and safety.

Placement stability is promoted because staff understand children's needs well and know carers strengths and areas for development. Long term matches are particularly well thought through. However, the recording of matching for short term and emergency placements is less well developed.

Carers are well trained prior to approval and are acutely aware of safeguarding procedures. Carers knowledge and understanding of child protection issues is impressive and they appropriately notify the service of arising issues. There are clear systems in place to safely manage child protection issues and effective monitoring systems ensure timely and safe resolutions.

Staff and carers are safely recruited which reduces the risk of children being exposed to potential abusers. Criminal Records Bureau checks and references are in place prior to staff starting work and references are verified. Although the service does not as standard seek the reasons for previous employment episodes ending if staff have worked with children or vulnerable adults in the past. This limits an otherwise rigorous process.

Panel function is a strength of the service and this contributes to a rigorous assessment process. Panel is quorate and its membership has a broad range of expertise. There are clear policies with regards panel function and decision making is clear and accountable. This process safeguards children and young people. Training of the panel is good and keeps members up to date with best practice.

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

The provision is good.

Equality and diversity are inconsistently promoted because there are gaps in service provision to support young people in their transitions to further education, training and in preparation to leave care. The contract between the authority and the pathway team limits the involvement of young people in foster care and excludes young people with disabilities from accessing this service directly. The involvement of the looked after children's education team does not go beyond 16. The authority has approved plans in place to address these shortfalls but they are yet to be implemented.

The foster service compensates for shortfalls by ensuring that carers are well equipped to meet the individual needs of children and young people. Carers receive specialist training in line with children's needs. This includes needs arising out of disability, preparation for independence and post 18 education. Needs arising out of culture, race; religion, language and disability are clearly defined in placement agreements and the emotional wellbeing of children is particularly well met. There are strong partnerships between health, education and the fostering team and this ensures accessible and prompt services for children. Adaptations to carers' homes and specialist equipment is provided to support children with disabilities. The children's disabilities team currently secures provision for children and young people receiving this service.

The fostering service gives priority to supporting children's learning and celebrates achievement. Carers are clear about meeting children's individual needs because they are fully involved in personal education plans and can access a range of educational support for children. Carers support children and young people well in their learning by attending parents evenings and information days. The service raises carers' and young people's awareness of routes to further education by providing good information and support. The education of looked after children is monitored well which includes children placed out of area and there is a clear policy for promoting school attendance. Children and young people are recognised and awarded for their achievements by the service. Young people do not receive support

from the looked after children's education team after reaching the age of 16. This does not provide a continuous service for young people moving to further education or work based training.

The fostering service currently provides short-term breaks to three children. Policies and procedures recognise that parents are central to this process and are adequate to meet the needs of the existing service. This aspect of the service is currently under review and plans are in place for its expansion.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people are encouraged to maintain and are supported well to develop family contacts and friendships. Contact arrangements are clearly defined and set out in placement agreements. Carers promote contact well and achieve a balance in the safeguarding of children. A child's heritage is valued within the service.

Children and young people's views are sought in a variety of ways. The local authority has devised a pledge to children about their rights and the services they can expect to receive. Children are consulted in their reviews and can contribute to their care through foster carers' reviews. Children who foster also contribute to this process and are included in activities and consultation days. There is a children's council, 'voice 4 u' that provides children with opportunities to talk to senior managers and contribute to service change. A group of children and young people are currently being consulted with about how to further develop this service. Young people are given opportunities to be involved in the inspection of services and in the recruitment of staff. This is good practice. There is regular information and a newsletter that goes out to children and young people which includes interviews with key staff, competitions and activities for children to take part in. Where children lack confidence in some arenas carers and a children's rights worker advocate strongly on their behalf and represent their views. Children with communication difficulties are able to voice their views via their foster carers but are not helped to express their views through different mediums. This limits their contribution.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people in foster care are disadvantaged because the contract between the local authority and the pathway team is limiting and does not enable them to have full access to the range of services provided. The contract is currently under review as the local authority acknowledge the need for change and are acutely aware that the service does not meet all young people's needs.

The foster service compensates for the lack of input for young people in foster placements by training foster carers well and has developed positive relationships

with the looked after children's education team, that prepare young people well for further education. Expectations are clearly defined and foster carers enable children to develop life skills from an early age. Carers are strong advocates for young people and contribute effectively to the pathway plan. Of note is the supported lodgings scheme which allows young people to remain in their placements beyond 18. However, because of the constraints of the service young people in stable placements are not accessed to the pathway team unless their placement breaks down. This is reactive and may mean that young people miss out on crucial preparation work. Young people say that they want more practical advice about living independently so that they are prepared for what this means.

Pathway plans are in place but these do not set out how needs arising out of race, religion and culture are to be met. Some young people do not understand what the term pathway plan means. Young people with disabilities do not receive a service from the pathway team but remain with the disabilities team until they reach 18. If appropriate, they then move directly to adult services and are supported in their transition by the disabilities team. Lack of direct access to the pathway team means opportunities are reduced.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The manner in which children's services is currently structured impacts upon the fostering service's ability to provide a consistent quality of service for young people beyond 16. This includes young people with disabilities who cannot directly access service provision themselves and are reliant upon the children's disability team to do so on their behalf. The local authority are aware of the limitations and proposals that redefine service delivery have been accepted. The fostering service equips carers well to support children and young people to achieve their potential and staff show a commitment to promoting equal opportunity.

A clear statement of purpose is in place that defines the parameters of the service well for stakeholders. A useful information guide is available for children and young people and informs them of their rights and outlines the services they can expect to receive. This is available in other languages but not available in formats suitable for children with communication difficulties.

The manager is very clear about the shortfalls relating to the service and areas for development. The service is managed effectively. The manager is approachable and widely respected for his insight into the fostering task. Monitoring is of a good quality and roles are well defined. The local authority is in the process of restructuring its services for children and young people and there are clear plans in place for service development in line with the shortfalls outlined in this report.

Fostering social workers are competent, skilled at what they do and experienced. It is common practice to share ideas and strengths within the team so that the best



possible outcomes are achieved. Staff are now appropriate in number to fulfil their role and there are plans in place to enhance efficient working. There are sound frameworks in place to ensure the smooth running of the service and work is prioritised and managed well. The quality of assessments of carers is very good which ensures the right people are recruited for the fostering task. Staff are well supported and appraised in their work.

Foster carers are very well supported to undertake their roles. Carers say that support is excellent and they 'can't fault' the service they receive. They say that staff are proactive about giving advice, readily available and that supervision is timely. An out of hours service, carers support groups and a helpline run by carers is valued. Pre-approval training is thorough and carers and staff value the appointment of a training officer. Carers say that this has made a difference to the quality of training post approval. There are good opportunities for staff also in this regard and training is accessible for most. Carers reviews are timely and clear recommendations are made for further support if required.

The local authority has recently implemented a cross departmental information technology system. The transition has resulted in some recording systems being compromised. As a result recording has become less accountable. Records relating to placement of children with carers are not automatically kept but are retrievable; unannounced visits to carers are taking place but are not being recorded; panel decision records are not available on carers files; and short breaks and respite placements are only recorded in retrospect. This means that staff are not always alerted to when a child is receiving respite care. Children and young people's records are being kept within regulation but the receipt of review minutes are not timely, which could result in delays in service provision for children.

Kinship placements are safely managed because the fostering team gives prompt support; there is a clear and accountable procedural framework in place; and social workers conduct weekly visits until the placement is assessed as suitable. Where children's social workers are unable to visit, fostering social workers undertake this role. Currently the assessment of kinship carers lies with the children's social workers. This results in a lack of control over process for the fostering team and assessments of suitability are not completed within the specified six week period. On occasions children have been placed with people other than foster carers when it has not been an emergency. The service has made considered decisions where this is the case and risk has been managed well. However, the service is operating out of regulation when this occurs.

## **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):

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- provide foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care services which meet his/her needs, in particular ensure that health care plans inform foster carers how to meet needs, to include risk management of seizures and moving and handling (NMS 12.1)
  - ensure written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the carer and child, particularly for short term and emergency placements (NMS 8.4)
  - seek verification from staff's previous employers whose duties involve working with children or vulnerable adults as to the reason why the employment ended (breach of regulation 20(3)(d)(i))
  - ensure that children, young people and their families are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality (NMS 7.1)
  - ensure that suitable means are provided frequently for any child with communication difficulties to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment (NMS 11.4)
  - ensure foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living (NMS 14.1)
  - provide a children's guide to the service which is suitable for all children receiving a service particularly children with communication difficulties (NMS 1.5)
  - ensure that the foster service's administration records contain all significant information relevant to the managing of the foster care service and as required by regulations in particular placement records; unannounced visits; shortbreak and respite placement episodes and panel decision records (NMS 25.1)
  - ensure carers store information in a secure manner (NMS 24.8)
  - ensure that children are only placed with approved foster carers unless placed under Regulation 38 in an emergency (breach of regulation 34(1)(a))
  - ensure that children are not accommodated for a period exceeding 6 weeks where immediate placements of children are made to people who are not foster carers. (breach of Regulation 38(2))