

Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council 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

This is a local authority adoption agency constituted under current legislation and provides, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption responsibilities. It recruits, assesses and approves adoptive families, matches and places children with adopters and supports people who have been affected by adoption, including birth parents and adopted adults. Some responsibilities, particularly adoption support, are undertaken through contractual arrangements with a registered adoption support agency.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This agency operates to a very high standard in almost all areas of its responsibilities. Staff are passionate about achieving the most appropriate outcomes for children and strive at all levels to deliver a child-centred service.

The agency operates a very thorough adopter recruitment and assessment process; this ensures only the most appropriate families are approved that can meet the needs of children requiring placements. Children are matched and placed following the most rigorous analysis of the potential success of the outcome and all workers across children's service work collaboratively to achieve this. Very experienced workers and managers operate to high levels of professional skill and integrity to promote and sustain high standards of practice in an atmosphere of inclusion and equality.

There is a very strong approach to supporting placements and people affected by adoption. This includes involving birth parents throughout the process and supporting them through a range of means in a non-judgemental approach. The recording of children's histories in life-story books, whilst good in quality, is not always achieved in a timely way, however.

The service is managed to a very high standard across all of its operations. It is efficient, focused on outcomes and well monitored at all levels of management, including the executive.

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has addressed all the issues raised following the last inspection report. It has not, as yet, however, made any significant gains in producing life-story work in a timely way in all instances.

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 is an agency which, through a rigorous, careful and conscientious approach, promotes the welfare of children above all other considerations.

The agency brings a very thorough and focused approach to the way it recruits prospective adopters, which is based on the wide range of the, often complex, needs of children requiring adoptive placements. Practice is detailed from the very beginning of the process and is undertaken with significant enthusiasm and skill. This ensures that the agency approves only those families that are motivated and can demonstrate their ability to be parents; this creates very optimistic and successful outcomes. There is a full and thorough approach to obtaining references and checks, although the health and safety checklist is not entirely full and detailed.

The arrangements for matching and placing children with the most suitable families to meet their needs are similarly robust. The adoption service carries out its family finding responsibilities with flair and an understanding of children's needs, and works closely with colleagues across children's services to secure the most appropriate placements. Information exchange is detailed and timely with all participants providing full and comprehensive reports from which considerations of suitability can be made. Great care is taken to address the heritage needs and circumstances of children throughout the whole recruitment, family finding and placement process.

The agency's rigour is complemented by a very well managed, efficiently organised and appropriately constituted adoption panel. It has a clear focus on meeting children's needs through adoption and gives detailed and experienced scrutiny to the high quality reports presented to it. It makes full and clear recommendations to the agency, which in turn makes decisions that are clearly focused on best outcomes. Decisions are made thoughtfully and in a timely way by a very experienced senior manager.

The manager and staff of the service have been recruited to a high standard and demonstrate qualities and qualifications in excess of those required. There is a demonstrably high level of skill, expertise and understanding in this agency, which results in professional practices of a considerably high degree.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The care and attention that is brought to the matching process is similarly employed in the way the agency approaches the task of preparing families for the introductions and placement of the children. This is embedded in the agency's relationship with prospective adopters throughout the preparation, assessment and matching process.

The agency has a very strong commitment to supporting adoptive families and demonstrates a clear understanding of the importance of maintaining input into placements to secure optimistic and stable futures. This commitment continues after children are adopted, should it be necessary or required, through a clear post adoption strategy. There is a high degree of user satisfaction for the efforts and conscientious approach that the service brings to assist families.

There is an experienced and committed legal advisor to the agency who provides assistance to both the panel and the service. The medical advisor attends most panels and can be contacted by the service to advise on a range of, often complex, medical issues. Other advice and assistance is accessed as and when required to cover a range of issues, including mental health and diversity issues.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency actively encourages the involvement of birth parents in the arrangements and planning for their child's adoption. Wherever possible their views are sought, taken seriously and acted upon if appropriate; these are clearly recorded.

There is a strong commitment within the service to ensuring that children's histories and circumstances are appropriately recorded and the information is developed into good quality life-story books. The agency works well with colleagues in the wider children's services to develop the gathering of information, and the processing of this into life stories, including advice and training. However, the competing priorities of children's social workers too often results in the late production of life-story work.

The involvement of the service with birth parents often evolves into the provision of continuous support following the development of trusting relationships. Contact arrangements are well managed and every assistance is provided to enable birth parents to develop and maintain whatever agreement has been decided as in their child's best interests. It is clear that the agency is committed to this part of the adoption triangle through its encouragement of birth parents in the adoption process. Other independent support is made available through an arrangement with a registered adoption support agency.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The preparation and arrangements for this inspection were of a particularly well managed standard, which demonstrates a very strong organisational approach to task and structure management.

This agency operates within a framework determined by a statement of purpose that is complemented and underpinned by very strong, accessible and focused policies, procedures, guidance and protocols. The excellent children's guides complement the authority's promotion of the principle of inclusion; other materials produced by the agency for service users are of a similar high standard.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The authority's commitment to equality and inclusion is evident throughout the organisation; in its policies, its practices and in its demonstrably assertive efforts made to develop a dialogue and relationship with all sectors of the community, including children.

The overall management arrangements, undertakings and structures are of a very high standard indeed. Workload allocation, staff support and quality assurance systems are well defined, efficiently organised and controlled with flair and professional integrity. Positive outcomes for children drive the management process and managers at all levels of the service demonstrate strong commitment to these. This is further complemented by an enthusiastic and committed executive that is fully apprised of the agency's activities.

The very experienced, qualified and skilled staff work in an enabling environment that encourages professional development and innovation. Training, including specialist courses, can be accessed by all workers.

The administrative infrastructure is very efficient and provides a solid framework within which the agency can operate and function. Record management is well organised and filing systems are efficient and accessible. Archive storage is of a very secure and safe standard. Case records are of a particularly high standard with all required information easily accessed; a recent innovation of independent auditing demonstrates commitment to quality record management. Personnel records are well managed, electronically, and contain all required information. Some, however, are unclear in the recording of the verification of written references.

The agency operates from well appointed premises in a residential area that are

accessible to the public, including those with mobility difficulties. They have appropriate facilities to enable the service to function efficiently and are secure.