

Oldham MBC Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

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Inspector	Sean White / Dennis Bradley
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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 service that undertakes, or makes arrangements for all statutory adoption responsibilities and duties. The agency recruits, prepares and assesses adopters and matches and places children with families. It provides support for adoptive families and adults affected by adoption; birth families are provided with information about an independent support agency which they can access. The service is located a short distance from the town centre of Oldham.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced, key inspection undertaken by two inspectors. It is the first inspection of this agency by Ofsted. The agency has a thorough and detailed approach to the recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adopters. This ensures that children are matched and placed with only the most suitable people that are able to promote their welfare and keep them safe. The service also provides a wide range of adoption support services to anyone affected by adoption enabling people to have a confident prospect of positive outcomes. Birth families are encouraged and enabled to be as involved in the adoption process as they wish, ensuring that their views and feelings are taken seriously.

The service is efficient and well-managed at all levels of the agency. Knowledgeable, conscientious and well-motivated staff are encouraged and supported in their duties which are carried out to a standard that is clearly focused on better outcomes for children.

Improvements since the last inspection

This was the first inspection of this service by Ofsted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The operations and undertakings of the agency demonstrate a clear focus on the safety and well-being of children placed for adoption and there is a clear understanding that positive outcomes are at the heart of all activity. Suitably presented policies and procedures underpin and inform a conscientious and thorough approach to its responsibilities and duties.

The agency has a forward-looking approach to the recruitment of adopters, using a range of media and techniques. Arrangements within the local consortium enables the agency to have a wide facility for sourcing suitable families for children requiring placement and efforts are made to locate families across the country if there are special or complex issues that cannot be met locally.

The agency has a thorough and detailed approach to the preparation and assessment of adopters, and the process is clearly aimed at ensuring only those people that are suitable are approved. Preparation is well-organised and delivered, eliciting positive responses from all adopters canvassed. The assessment process is sensitive and respectful, yet rigorous and focused on suitability to be an adoptive parent.

The adoption panel brings further rigour and quality control to the process and only makes recommendations following thorough scrutiny and deliberation of the reports it considers. The panel is suitably constituted, efficiently administered and well-managed. The agency makes its decisions in a timely way and continues the thoroughness of the whole process. A recurring issue for the panel is inconsistency in the preparation and presentation of children's permanence reports. Although the panel is sufficiently robust in its quality monitoring, the agency has yet to demonstrate consistent improvement on this issue.

There is a suitably thorough and well-managed staff recruitment and selection process that ensures only the most able managers and workers are appointed. Workers demonstrate a high level of skill, knowledge and understanding of adoption issues; all are qualified, registered social workers but recent changes to the staff team have reduced the number of people with the Post-Qualifying Award.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There is a focused and conscientious approach to providing support to placements. The service works closely with professionals from all disciplines and agencies to provide the most positive framework within which families can establish themselves.

Support for adopted children, adoptive families and adults affected by adoption is provided by the service. It demonstrates a clear understanding of the necessity for

detailed assessments of need and the importance of providing suitable packages of support based on such assessments. Birth records counselling is undertaken by skilled practitioners and evidence of positive outcomes demonstrates the agency's quality and sensitivity of service.

The agency has legal and medical advice readily available to both the service and the panel; other specialists are sought and commissioned as required or necessary.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency demonstrates an improved approach to the inclusion of birth families in the planning for children's adoption. There is a commitment to encouraging the involvement of birth families in both preparing for the future and in understanding the past, and an understanding of the importance this plays in the lives of adopted children.

There are well-established systems in place to undertake life-story work, using family support workers with the experience and skill in this area. The life-story books are presented and constructed to a good standard and are clearly prepared with the future needs of adopted children in mind. There are some inconsistencies in the timeliness of life-story work being completed, although there are protocols in place to manage and monitor this. There is also some confusion about the management and ownership of this work that the agency has not fully clarified, which may contribute to these inconsistencies.

There are established arrangements for independent support and counselling to be available for birth families and every encouragement is given at various stages of the adoption process for this to be accessed.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Although this agency has experienced considerable management challenges in recent times due to ill health, retirement and the very recent appointment of the current manager, it has maintained organisational coherence. The Statement of Purpose and associated policies, procedures and structures provide a clear framework within which the service operates; these inform and underpin practice. The children's guide, however, is not very sophisticated in its presentation and is only suitable for older children.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency has a welcoming approach to all members of the community and actively encourages families from diverse backgrounds to apply to be adopters. Great care is taken to match children with complex heritages with people that are able to promote and understand their backgrounds.

The information for prospective adopters is well-produced and illustrates clearly what people can expect from the agency; it is clear that the welcome extended by the agency to enquirers is informative, sensitive and encouraging.

The management arrangements are well-structured and undertaken by people with the requisite skills, knowledge and understanding of carrying on an adoption agency. There is regular monitoring and quality assurance systems ensure that senior managers and the executive are fully informed of the work of the service.

Operational management is encouraging and supportive. Workers are enabled to undertake their duties to the best of their abilities and are given every opportunity to develop skills and expertise. Opportunities for training are good and the induction and development of new workers to the service is particularly good. Allocation of responsibilities and workload management is well-considered, equitable and continually monitored.

Staffing resources are such that workloads are sufficient to meet the needs and demands of the service. An imminent reconfiguration of the service is expected to add further value to operational effectiveness.

Administrative arrangements are well-managed and efficient. There are sufficient resources to enable the agency to function effectively and to support operations. Case records, both paper and electronic, are well-maintained, although there has been less auditing overview in recent times because of the changes in manager. Staff and panel members' records contained all essential, required information but there are some minor details missing.

The premises provide a comfortable working environment, are secure and are accessible during normal business hours.

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):

- develop greater consistency in the preparation of children's permanence reports (NMS 5)

- provide clearer management arrangements for the undertaking of life story work and its ownership (NMS 8)
- develop children's guides relevant to a wider age range (NMS 1)
- arrange for case files to be regularly audited (NMS 27).