

Manchester City Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC056753
Inspection date	04/03/2011
Inspector	Sean White / Stella Henderson
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Family Placement Service 6th Floor, Wenlock Way Offices, Wenlock Way, MANCHESTER, M12 5DH
Telephone number	0161 881 0911
Email	
Registered person	Manchester City Council; Children, Families and Social Care
Registered manager	Joanna Waterhouse
Responsible individual	Anthony Decrop
Date of last inspection	05/01/2009

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 local authority adoption service undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory adoption provision under current legislation. The agency recruits, prepares, assesses and approves adoptive parents; it also matches and places children with approved adopters. Support is either provided by the service or through arrangements made by them, or contracted by them. Support is provided or arranged for anyone, adult or child, who has been affected by adoption.

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.

The agency has demonstrated, through a well-coordinated improvement plan, a strong commitment to the safety and well-being of children placed for adoption. There is a clear and committed approach to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of adopters; this ensures that only the most suitable people are approved. A strong approach to diversity adds further value to the range of people recruited and approved, which improves the opportunities for placement of children with particular needs.

There is a clear focus on the need to support families with children in placement and post-adoption support is managed well in partnership with an independent agency.

Children's histories and backgrounds are conscientiously explored and recorded, although there is some inconsistency in this area. There are some very good examples of life-story work and child permanence reports that present children's backgrounds in a clear and coherent way. However, some are not produced in a timely way and some do not capture fully the detail and subtleties of children's birth family histories. Birth parents, nevertheless are encouraged and enabled to be involved and contribute to the planning for their children's futures.

Management arrangements are good with a clear focus on efficiency and development. Workers are very well supported and the quality of work in most areas is of a high standard.

Improvements since the last inspection

This agency has made considerable efforts to address the issues raised following the last inspection and has demonstrated a commitment to improvements in all areas. Structural changes, which include more coherent management arrangements, an increase in staffing and greater operational efficiency have all impacted positively on

the service's performance. Adoption panels are better managed, preparation and assessment arrangements are more focused, there are better opportunities for staff training and procedures have been updated and clarified. There remain, nevertheless, some quality control matters yet to be fully addressed and life-story work is still not as timely as it should be.

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 long term welfare and safety of children is at the core of the service's strategy and operational practice. It undertakes its responsibilities to a good standard and is conscientious in its approach.

The agency has a clear process for ensuring that children are matched with the most suitable families. It has a dedicated team that manages the recruitment and screening of potential adopters and uses information about the needs of children requiring placement to inform practice. A recruitment policy defines the work of this team and it functions well and in close cooperation with the adoption team. There has been a low disruption rate in recent times which demonstrates the success of the matching process.

The assessment of prospective adopters is undertaken with due rigour and attention to detail. Prospective Adopter Reports are well written and provide a clear analysis of people's backgrounds, motivation and parenting capacity. Assessments are carried out sensitively, but there is a clear focus on ensuring that only the most suitable people are ultimately approved.

The adoption panels bring further scrutiny and thoroughness to the process. They are managed well, have a committed and conscientious membership and are suitably constituted. They are diligent in their analysis of the work presented to them and exercise their quality assurance responsibilities with great care. Recommendations are only made following a full and detailed examination of reports presented to them. Decisions are made within timescales and demonstrate further robust analysis. Panels are administered and organised well; panel minutes are full and informative.

The recruitment and selection procedures for managers and staff are robust which ensure only the most suitable people are appointed.

Workers demonstrate a full understanding of adoption issues and the underpinning legislation, and their practice is of a high standard. There is significant knowledge

and experience in the team which is shared with colleagues across children's services to improve understanding and practice in adoption work across the board.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The support available to, and provided for, families with children in placement is responsive, sensitive to need and underpinned by a wide range of resources. Adoptive families are very appreciative of the support available and feel that the agency operates in a way that gives them confidence. Helping people to understand the complexities of adoption and supporting them through the challenges is a clear demonstration of the agency's motivation.

The needs of families are understood by the agency. Specialist advisers and resources, which include highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners, are accessed and deployed wherever there is need. Positive and optimistic outcomes are a feature of the agency's support work.

Assessments of need for post adoption support are undertaken by a skilled and experienced worker. A well-monitored arrangement with an adoption support agency ensures that those affected by adoption receive a responsive service based on a considered assessment.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency has a strong commitment to engaging birth families in the adoption process and encourages birth parents to contribute to the planning for their children's futures. It also takes seriously the wishes and feelings of birth parents and works with them to achieve manageable outcomes. All birth parents are encouraged, and given the opportunity, to access independent counselling services at any stage of the adoption process, or afterwards, if required.

There is a strong motivation in the agency to ensure that children's backgrounds and birth family histories are accurately and suitably recorded in child permanence reports and through life-story work. This is of a very good standard in many cases, encouraged by training and mentoring. There are, however, some inconsistencies in content and timeliness; the agency is fully aware of this and has plans in place to address and manage this.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency has a clear strategic and operational infrastructure that is informed by a Statement of Purpose that outlines the service's aims and objectives. It provides informative details about its responsibilities and how they are to be met. The statement is underpinned by a range of up to date policies and procedures that provide a clear framework within which the service operates. There are two children's guides for young and older children that are suitable for providing children with an understanding of their situation and how adoption works.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a clear understanding of the necessity to provide services and opportunities based on individual circumstances and need. The agency has a strong reputation for approving adopters from a wide range of backgrounds, which enhances the placing opportunities for children with complex needs.

The agency is managed well. In recent times there has been a concerted effort to define the management arrangements in a more coherent way. This has had a positive impact on structural and organisational matters leading to more efficient outcomes. An increase in staffing has added further value and effectiveness to the agency's work.

Staff are supported and encouraged well in their work and are enabled to undertake their duties in a carefully managed and structured environment. There is a strong commitment to regular supervision and good training opportunities encourage the development of knowledge and skills in a range of specialist areas.

The service is efficiently organised and people understand the agency structure, lines of responsibility and accountability. Administrative arrangements are suitably managed and case files are maintained to a high standard. Information for enquirers is detailed, well presented and sent out quickly.

Records are maintained well and all required information is contained in personnel and panel members' files. There is an inconsistency, however, between on-line and hard copy staff application forms.

Premises are suitable for the operation of an adoption agency and are secure.

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):

- continue to develop a more focused approach to the preparation of child permanence reports (NMS 7)
- produce life-story work in a consistent, timely way (NMS 8)
- ensure all types of staff application forms are consistent in the details asked for (NMS 28)