

Bournemouth Fostering and Placements Team

Inspection report for LA Fostering 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

Bournemouth Borough Council's Fostering and Placements Team is managed within the borough's Childcare and Family Support Services structure. A Children's Services Manager and a Team Manager are responsible for the management of the fostering team. The team have responsibility for the recruitment, assessment, training and support to all of the borough's foster carers, shared carers (those that provide short term breaks for children with a disability), pathway carers and kinship carers. The team consists of eight qualified social workers, a senior practitioner, an accommodation social worker (young people leaving care), a family support worker, a social work assistant and a recruitment and placement development worker. There are also five administrators to provide support, including a panel administrator and two finance clerks (LAC).

The team provide the following placements and services for children and young people:

- shared care to support families and prevent family breakdown;
- short term foster care to support families through crises or in an emergency to protect a child from harm;
- permanent substitute family care by way of long term foster care for children who cannot return to their birth family;
- assessment and support of friends and family carers;
- pathways carers for those young people leaving care who still need a degree of support within their accommodation; and
- advice on out of borough placements, including Independent Fostering Agencies and residential placements.

At the time of the inspection the fostering service has 101 looked after children placed with their foster carers, and 24 young people placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. The service has 76 approved foster carers (12 of these are specific short break carers). Bournemouth Fostering and Placements Team has its own established fostering panel which recommends initial approval, continued approval after the first year of becoming a foster carer and any changes to a foster carer's approval status. The Fostering and Placements Team is soon to be co-located with a new Looked After Children's Team, which will also include clinical psychology, education and medical input.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There has been some improvements over the past year, with three out of the four previous requirements now being complied with. Only three of the previous good practice recommendations made have been fully met. The most significant improvement is planned for the near future. The fostering service will be co-located with the newly established 'looked after children' team. Health and education officers and a participation worker will be a part of this new team/service alongside the placing social workers, to aid better planning for children.

There has been more of a commitment and priority given to ensuring children and young people are matched appropriately to carers. New procedures are now in place to better plan for suitable long term placements for children and young people. The British Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) child's permanence report, matching report and proposed permanence support plan are presented to the adoption and permanence panel, with the proposed foster carer's assessment and review documents. This ensures clearer sharing of information, that the child or young person and their family has been fully consulted, and that the proposed placement is the most suitable having regard to all the circumstances.

Training opportunities for foster carers have remained considerably limited over the past year, but progress is now being made in ensuring training improves considerably. A worker now has the specific task of monitoring and planning training for foster carers. The current plans include safe caring training, links with a family therapy organisation to provide specific training on attachment, and the Webster-Stratton parenting programme.

Developments have been made to the foster care agreements and to the foster placement agreements to ensure all the information required by regulation is obtained.

Progress has been made on ensuring better efficiency and team effectiveness in order to provide a quality service to children and young people. Staff's competence is closely monitored, files are audited, regular supervision is provided by an accessible manager, and there is easy access to email and internet resources to aid professional development and communication. New staff are given the opportunity to be mentored by more experienced staff.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health needs of young people placed with Bournemouth foster carers are well met. Foster carers ensure that young people receive routine health checks, and health is monitored closely by the specialist nurses for looked after children, social workers and by the independent reviewing officers. Review documentation seen for four young people all confirmed that they had received up to date immunisations, dental and optical checks, and had an annual medical check with their GP. The

systems allowing for close monitoring by the supervising social workers of how the foster carers are achieving positive outcomes for young people's health are limited. The supervision visit forms completed by the supervising social workers do not allow for there to be a specific focus or a record made on the outcome 'being healthy' for young people. The health plan for the young person is not kept on file by the supervising social worker, and foster carers are not encouraged to keep an individual health 'passport'/ record of the young person's health appointments and checks.

Ninety-four percent of the Bournemouth looked after children and young people have an up to date health care plan and assessment. Initial health plans are completed for all children when they are first looked after, and the specialist nurses complete a health review after four months, and then yearly. The specialist nurses have attended one support group for foster carers, but do not have the opportunity to liaise more regularly with foster carers, and provide consultations or training.

Medical consent is obtained promptly for the children and young people, and foster carers have copies of this. Not all foster carers have first aid training, and health and safety training has not been provided. Foster carers have received training and information sessions on attachment issues, and on the emotional needs of young people looked after. The clinical psychologist is also available weekly to foster carers to help support them with understanding young people's needs and behaviours. This is a valuable service which supports placement stability and promotes the development and health of the children and young people.

Links with specialist mental health services for children and adolescents are good. The young people randomly sampled as part of this inspection were all receiving support from specialist services to help with emotional issues. Foster carers have a good understanding of the health services available to young people, and a clear awareness of their role in helping to promote the health of the children and young people in their care.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The management and staff are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare. The responsible individual and manager are provided with the opportunity for further training that ensures they have the skills and experience necessary for managing the fostering service. There are clear recruitment procedures, which detail the need for all the necessary checks to be carried out on staff. However, three members of staff have not had a renewal of their Criminal Record Bureau check within the last three years.

The fostering service adequately protects children and young people from abuse and neglect, but improvement is still needed to ensure more robust protection and scrutiny of care. Where there has been concerns about the quality of care provided by foster carers, immediate action has been taken to safeguard the children. Strategy meetings are held promptly and children are actively listened to, to identify

their views. However, foster carers' files do not accurately reflect the number of complaints or outcome of investigations. This does not allow for close monitoring of the nature of complaints made against them, and review documentation does not include an accurate picture of any concerns. The fostering panel however, are regularly informed of serious allegations and complaints against foster carers, and cases are brought to panel for a review of their continued approval following a child protection investigation. The service has yet to implement the latest good practice guidance on responding to concerns about foster carers. Unannounced visits to carers are a way to monitor safety for children, but evidence of this practice happening is lacking.

To ensure foster carers homes are free from hazards, supervising social workers undertake regular health and safety checks of the homes and ensure that the transport used for children is safe. Additional safety equipment is also provided promptly, for example stair gates and car seats. Each fostering household has a safe care plan, detailing how the carers intend to keep the child protected and safe within the home. These plans do not always include information about how alcohol, cigarettes, lighters are stored, access to computers or videos, or rules about bedtimes, or friends visiting. They are not updated following a new child or young person moving into the home, and carers and supervising social workers have not received training on safe caring skills.

Although risk assessments are now routinely completed when a child or young person moves into a fostering placement, they do not always reflect the identified risks previously shown by the young people. There is no system or strategy in place for supervising social workers to review these assessments and develop them further with foster carers once the placement has started.

Matching children and young people's needs to a carer capable of meeting the needs has improved, and the children and young people are benefiting considerably from this. The fostering team have introduced new procedures and practice guidance for ensuring children requiring long term care are placed with the most suitable carers. Children and young people's views on the foster family they would like are actively sought and listened to. The fostering team consult with placing social workers and independent reviewing officers who know the child well, and follow through their recommendations. Observations and discussions with the fostering team evidenced clearly that the importance of matching is a big focus and commitment to them. Recorded evidence of good matching remains limited however. The matching proforma used for short term placements does not compare the child's or young person's needs to that of the carer's capabilities. Supervising social workers continue to have limited information about the needs of the child in order to make effective decisions about matching.

The fostering panel adds an additional safeguard to the service, ensuring foster carers are suitable people to provide quality placements to children and young people. The panel is provided with regular and detailed management information and have up to date knowledge of carers and children. Panel members receive training specific to their role. The panel is effective and confident at challenging the fostering

service where needed, and in ensuring children and young people's needs are met. The fostering panel does not currently have a member with expertise in education, in child health or a person who has experience of being in care. The attendance levels have also dropped for one of the members.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The fostering service promotes equality and values diversity. Children and young people's culture, religion, language and disability are recognised and taken into account when services are provided for them. The team members are actively engaged in learning more about different community groups and religions. The recruitment and development officer is in contact with Muslim, Hindu and Black and Ethnic Minority groups in Bournemouth and Hampshire, in order to raise the profile of the need for foster carers.

The service recognises the need to support and enhance children and young people's confidence and self esteem. The clinical psychologist and supervising social workers provide guidance and support to foster carers around identity issues and promoting self-worth, as do the specialist nurses for looked after children.

The fostering service has also improved its links with the education service for looked after children, to ensure more of a priority is given to encouraging educational attainment. The service adequately promotes the educational achievement of the young people in foster care, and this is likely to further improve with the development of the 'looked after children' team. A specialist education case worker attends the monthly placement meetings, and the reviews of foster carers now include feedback from the education team. One hundred percent of school age children looked after in foster care in Bournemouth have a personal education plan, which is provided to foster carers. The priority given by foster carers to promoting a child or young person's educational attainment is variable. Some foster carers are great advocates for a young person's education, and are described as "passionate" about ensuring children's educational needs are met. Others need more monitoring and challenging to ensure they adequately promote education. Training was provided last year to foster carers on improving the educational attainment of looked after young people and they are fully aware of the specialist education team for looked after children.

The fostering case files and supervision notes do not evidence that the supervising social workers monitor the personal education plans, or how the foster carers are meeting the child's or young person's educational needs. Where a young person is excluded from school, there is no clear arrangement made for how the foster carer is to provide structured occupation during school hours.

The specialist workers monitor closely any exclusions or disruptions to school placements. Ten young people missed at least 25 days education in the last 12 months who were placed with foster carers, and seven young people have fixed term

exclusions. This is a relatively high number. The percentage of young people who have achieved at least one GCSE this year (whose placement was with Bournemouth fostering and placements team) has risen from last year to 62.5%. This statistic and the 4% who achieved five or more GCSE's is below the national average. However, the number of young people with a statement of special educational needs is higher than average.

The shared care service continues to link closely with the disabled children's team, in ensuring appropriate placements are provided for children who have a disability.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering service is good at promoting contact for a child or young person with family and friends. Foster carers are clear about their role in maintaining and developing positive family contacts and friendships. Foster carers also have clear information about contact arrangements and any risk assessments associated with contact. The supervising social workers use their knowledge and understanding of attachment issues to support carers with any difficult relationship issues the child or young person may have.

Consultation and participation by young people is being given a high priority, with the fostering service valuing the views and opinions of children and young people. Improvements are planned with the employment of a participation worker, and a new contract with a children's rights and advocacy service. There are also established links with organisations producing theatrical shows which include young people looked after.

There is evidence that the fostering team are ensuring children's views are sought around placements, and that these are actively addressed and responded to.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

This outcome has not been fully assessed.

Foster carers are supported and encouraged to ensure that young people develop the necessary skills and knowledge necessary for adult living. Foster carers are involved in pathway planning. The fostering service also includes a dedicated worker responsible for recruiting and supporting pathways carers. These carers provide accommodation for young people leaving care who still need a degree of support within their accommodation.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide. The service is due to develop further as Bournemouth Borough Council have set up a new dedicated looked after children's team, which includes the fostering service, to better meet the needs of looked after children and young people. Information for children and young people will be a focus of the participation worker, as currently the information provided to children and young people is limited. The service has recently had a reduction in the number of carers approved by it, and this affects the availability of the service to meet its aims and objectives. The recruitment and development officer has made good links with other agencies and services in order to evaluate and analyse recruitment successes and difficulties. A higher priority is now given to following up initial enquiries, and there has been a recent recruitment campaign that included a variety of publicity events and coverage.

Staff are organised and managed in a way that adequately delivers a safe and effective service. Improvements continue to be needed to provide a higher quality and good service. The manager is committed to providing a quality service and has established links with other services and fostering organisations, for example sharing of good practice, developing protocols with independent agencies, and sharing funding for recruitment campaigns. Morale and cohesiveness within the team has been prioritised to further enhance the effectiveness of the team. The manager is easily accessible for advice and support, with staff's competence monitored closely through supervision and appraisals. Supervising social workers have very manageable caseloads, and the team is fully staffed. There have been limited developments on updating forms, procedures and the foster carers handbook, and good practice recommendations made at previous inspections remain outstanding.

Foster carers receive a good level of support and supervision by the supervising social workers, which contributes to carers developing their skills and meeting the needs of children and young people. Placing social workers value the support by the fostering service, especially where placements are unstable. The family support workers role is considerably valued, and helps to maintain placements for the benefit of the child or young person. Foster carers are further supported by accessible respite care when needed, a foster carer forum, and out of hours support. Foster carer events are also organised, showing value and recognition to foster carers hard work. The more formal monitoring of foster carers competence and skill through annual reviews, and as previously stated through unannounced visits, has not been adequately managed by the fostering service. Over 30% of reviews of foster carers are overdue, and this has been a consistent breach in regulation since 2005. Other professionals consider the reviews of foster carers do not appropriately improve or challenge poor practice where this is needed. The manager is aware of the need for an improved system for monitoring and improving the quality of the reviews.

Foster carers do not benefit from a training programme that meets their needs or is

specific to foster care. However, the recent introduction of a working group for training, a dedicated worker for foster carer training, a refocusing of the budgets for training and links with training providers will ensure that foster carer training is provided, in turn providing better skilled foster carers.

Case records for carers and children include all significant information required by regulation, although the accuracy and detail of this varies. The list of children that have been or are placed with foster carers is not always accurate on foster carers' files. Detailed records of allegations and complaints are missing from some files. Exemptions for foster carers going over numbers or accommodating a child out of category is not clearly evidenced on the files.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
21	ensure that each foster carer's approval is reviewed at intervals of not more than a year. The review must include a range of enquiries necessary to review whether the person continues to be a suitable foster carer, and take into account the views of the foster carer, and any child placed with the carers (Regulation 29).	01/10/2007

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- provide first aid and health and safety training to foster carers.
- ensure that criminal record bureau checks for staff are renewed every three years.
- carry out unannounced visits to foster carers at least once a year.
- ensure safe care plans and risk assessments are sufficiently detailed, reviewed at the start of each placement and thereafter at regular intervals.
- provide clear and accurate details on foster carer's files of any allegations and complaints investigations and outcomes.
- ensure that written documentation shows how children and young people are carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his needs.
- ensure that panel members include an independent member with expertise in

education, child health and a person who at any time has been placed with foster carers or whose child has been placed with foster carers.

- develop systems for social workers to monitor and ensure that foster carers are supporting the child or young person to achieve positive outcomes for health and education.
- ensure accurate and up to date information is recorded on carers' files of children and young people placed with them, and details of any exemptions or extensions to their approval status.