

East Sussex Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC062787
Inspection date	17/12/2007
Inspector	Lindy Latreille
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	East Sussex County Council, 52 St. Leonards Road, EASTBOURNE, East Sussex, BN21 3UU
Telephone number	01323 747191
Email	steve.hunt@eastsussexcc.gov.uk
Registered person	East Sussex County Council
Registered manager	Vacant
Responsible individual	Theresa Lavelle-Hill
Date of last inspection	04/12/2006

© Crown copyright 2007

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

The East Sussex Fostering Service has 205 households with 250 young people placed with foster carers, and 42 in kinship placements. The fostering service is responsible for the recruitment, preparation, assessment, supervision and support of foster carers.

Placement support provides care for young people who will benefit from specific specialist input to ensure placement stability. Where placements cannot be made within the fostering services own resources Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) that have been approved as preferred providers by the fostering service, are used. The fostering service is based in Eastbourne and is part of the integrated services for children. One of the Heads of Service for Looked After Children is the agency decision maker, who considers the recommendations made by the fostering panel. The fostering panel is responsible for recommending the approval of all foster carers and changes to their approval status. The panel chair is the Head of Safeguarding in East Sussex.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The inspection took place over five days with one inspector. Pre inspection self assessment documentation was received prior to the inspection and the acting manager fully facilitated the inspection. Home visits were made to three foster carers and young people were consulted. A meeting of the East Sussex Foster Carers Association (ESFCA) facilitated the opportunity to meet with a number of foster carers.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the service has maintained a satisfactory level of notifications. Foster carers have all been supplied with body maps to use to collate unexplained injury sites. The management of infection and medication is delivered to foster carers in their preparation training, and other supporting training. Matching is evaluated to provide the necessary reports for the Corporate Parenting Panel by the acting manager. Foster carers have appropriate photographs to support the missing person procedure.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health needs of young people are well met and this is confirmed in the Joint Area Review (JAR) report. Looked after children (LAC) have access to a range of services and there are improving links to the children and adolescence mental health service (CAMHS). Duty have clear arrangements to contact named nurses to alert them to young people who are fostered in their area. Health and dental checks have been at 85% over the past five years; changing culture sees greater numbers of young people taking responsibility for their own health in adolescent years. The LAC nurses write the health care plans. A recommendation from the JAR is that prevalence of drugs and smoking is monitored to consider trends and patterns. Consent is clarified in the LAC documentation, which staff actively chase if requests are unmet. Foster carers are aware of the limitations on their actions and when to contact the service for clarification.

Health promotion in areas of sexual health is identified as a need for LAC and guidance is being developed currently.

A range of training is available for staff and foster carers; much of this is joint training and confirmed as of a good quality by those consulted. The local authority provided funding to the East Sussex foster carers association (ESFCA) who organised a two day conference on attachment with international speakers. Those who attended greatly valued the event.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The service is managed at present by an experienced and qualified operations manager, during the absence of the fostering manager. Since May 2007 he has supported the staff team through a relocation of offices and reorganisation successfully, and is developing improved quality monitoring systems to meet the current needs of the service.

A vigorous assessment process sees suitable foster carers recruited. Those who leave the service often do so following adoption or arrangements for permanence. An identified need to recruit more foster carers from diverse heritage has met this year's target. There is extra support, and financial benefit, for foster carers who care for young people with extremely challenging needs.

A total of 70% of the LAC are in stable placements in the fostering service. A matching meeting with the duty and service managers is held weekly, and recorded, to consider the best placement to meet the young person's needs. All avenues are explored and family conferencing used to reduce the number of LAC. Since the last inspection, 84 young people have been matched for permanence and 43 adopted. All foster carers follow mandatory training in safeguarding during their first two years with the service, and are expected to follow a subsequent programme after that.

This is monitored through their annual reviews.

The Head of Safeguarding sits as panel chair, thus ensuring a scrutiny of the service. Safe caring guidelines are prepared with each fostering household during the initial

assessment period. There is no evidence that these are reviewed at foster carer's reviews.

Criminal record checks are in place for all staff and foster carers, but collation of the record is inconsistent.

Staff recruitment has not been inspected. The JAR report reflected that records seen at County Hall evidenced good procedures, though some inconsistent recording. The fostering panel was attended and conforms to requirements. The acting manager attends as advisor. The chair confirms the resolve to place young people in their extended families where possible. The panel are active in debate and verbatim minutes are kept. The fostering service decision maker mostly upholds the recommendations of the panel. At present no attendees have the opportunity to feedback on their experience of attending the panel.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The JAR report recognises that the service has increased recruitment and placements to meet the needs of young people with diverse heritage. There are links to community groups that support black and minority ethnic (BME) communities locally. The fostering service has set up a support group for carers who have placements of young people with diverse heritage. There is training for all foster carers to raise awareness and increase knowledge of diversity and equality. The children's equality steering group (CESG) identified in their research that special schools do not believe that they have equality or racial incidents. CESG believe a training need in raising awareness is identified. The fostering service recognises that black role models are needed for LAC, and similarly eastern Europeans for increased numbers of young people.

The Education Support Team (TEST) works actively with the fostering service; the manager sits on the fostering panel. Funding for home tutors has been increased. School attendance stands at 89% for 2006/2007, and mentors are in place for LAC in year nine. One in four care leavers has achieved five or more GCSE's and this year has seen a rise in LAC achieving one to five subjects at GCSE. Personal education plans (PEP's) are mostly in place, but some are out of date. Staff confirm that they request the documentation but do not always evidence it.

Some innovative work is being achieved through the placement support team, which has widened the young people's learning experiences by bidding for Youth Opportunity Funding. Their successes includes an allotment, a caravan and recently a people carrier.

The local authority has appointed a Virtual Head who will co-ordinate the education services for young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Social workers endeavour to maintain contact where it is in the young person's best interest. A policy on supervised contact has recently been collated by fostering,

locality and residential managers under the direction of the Head of LAC. Contact is clarified and evidenced in the files and checked at foster carers' supervision each month.

Young people are encouraged, by the placement support team, to attend conferences. The experiences lead to holistic development and learning and allow the young people to have a voice in the management of their care. Feedback is gathered following activities and user groups. Foster carers now produce a household profile for the young people to see prior to placement; a response to young people's feedback. Young people that volunteer are now having that time accrued on their curriculum vitae. The placement support team works closely with neighbouring authorities to maximise ideas and resources. Young people attend staff recruitment panels, the most recent being for the Head of Integrated services.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose is recently updated and a young person's guide is being re-designed, with translation available. A story book is used to explain the fostering process to younger children. At present there is no mention of the service's commitment to diversity or the ongoing work to support diverse heritage.

The JAR report recognises that foster carers are well managed and valued; minutes of meetings evidence this. All foster carers are members of the Fostering Network, paid for by the local authority, and members of the East Sussex Foster Carers Association (ESFCA). The attachment conference in November 2007 provided a unique event of significant learning and the Association accepted an invitation to make a presentation to the annual meeting of the Fostering Network. The Association works with the local authority to plan and fund activities, events and residential holidays for young people in the fostering service.

The fostering staff team is stable, qualified and experienced. They are enthusiastic and keen to keep updated in order to deliver a good level of training in 'Skill to Foster'. The staff are developing their expertise in Special Guardianship Orders (SGO). The local authority has a policy of 'no detriment' to the foster carers with SGOs and permanence until the young person is 18 years; the statutory period is for two years. Staff feel supported by the Head of Service and the acting fostering manager, but the service is carrying four vacancies and staff identify the effects of carrying these positions with little cover.

Foster carers are encouraged to attend training once approved and 14 carers started a national vocational qualification (NVQ) in September 2007. Panel minutes evidence that actions are taken when foster carers annual reviews are considered.

All records are stored securely. Staff recognise that although they do chase required documentation they do not always evidence it.

Administrative records are maintained. Many of these now are on Care First, the local authority's information technology (IT) system. Some omissions in the files can be seen to be due to a mix of paper and IT systems. There is a low level of complaints and all have been resolved in the first stage. Unannounced visits to fostering households do take place, but the system at present does not allow for this information to be quickly retrieved.

Where young people are being cared for by extended family longer than a 28 day period the panel considers the assessment made to fulfil Regulation 38. As with recruited foster carers, a full assessment takes place and all resources and support is available to a kinship carer.

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
17	ensure that there are sufficient experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the fostering service. Regulation 19	17/03/2008

Recommendations

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

- include the fostering service's commitment to support diverse heritage for young people in the statement of purpose. NMS 1
- develop an evaluative process for attendees at panel. NMS 30
- ensure that all current personal education plans are kept on file. NMS 13
- ensure that the information technology system reflects the current status of all criminal record checks (CRB) and destroy the paper copy after six months. NMS 9
- evidence that safe caring guidelines are considered at each foster carer's review. NMS 9
- ensure that records reflect that missing documentation is requested. NMS 25