

Richmond Fostering Services

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC041835
Inspection date	03/03/2008
Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid
Type of inspection	Key

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Registered manager	Paul Walsh
Responsible individual	Paul Walsh
Date of last inspection	19/02/2007

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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

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Fostering Service aims to provide a range of fostering services, which comply with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The primary aim of the service is to provide a range of high quality foster placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of looked after children and young people. The service provides temporary and permanent foster carers for children and young people.

The service is based in Twickenham, close to other local authority services. The types of the service offered are: Short Term Foster Care, Permanent Foster Care, Short Break Service and Kinship Care.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. This is an outstanding service. Children's and young people's welfare is enhanced by the excellent relationship that exist between staff, foster carers, children and young people. Children's and young people's health care needs are well met. They are living in a safe environment, they are attending schools regularly and young people have opportunity to develop independent living skills for semi or independent living in preparation for leaving care. The service works closely with a wide range of agencies in order to meet the full range of children's and young people's needs. Foster carers and staff are well supported by the management team who have strong commitment and focus on improvement.

Improvements since the last inspection

The registered manager is asked to include a positive proof of identity including a recent photograph in each foster carer's file and notify the regulatory body regarding his findings and outcomes about the comments made by the Looked After Children's (LAC) Team during the previous inspection. The registered person has taken appropriate steps to improve the quality of the service provided to children and young people in foster care.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote the health of children and young people in foster care. The service works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure best outcomes for children and young people and support foster carers in securing the best standards of health care. The service works closely with the multi-agency team and other professionals to ensure best health outcomes for children and young people.

The service ensures that foster carers are given a clear, easily understandable health care plan for each child before the placement. The plan details children's and young people's specific and general health issues that are to be addressed and by whom.

Foster carers are well supported and encouraged through the provision of various specialist health care training and the support provided by the service. This helps to develop their knowledge and skills to meet children's and young people's individual health care needs.

Foster carers maintain good records of all medical appointments children and young people have attended or refused to attend. Foster carers keep records of all medication administered to children's and young people. Medication is safely stored so as to promote children and young people's wellbeing.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The Principal Manager and the Fostering Manager of the service are both very experienced and suitably qualified to manage the service. Both managers have several years of management experiences in fostering services and other child care settings. The fostering service's staff and foster carers spoke very positively about the management support they receive.

All relevant checks on staff, foster carers, panel members and others involved with children and young people are carried out by the Human Resources department. The Human Resources department ensures that robust checks are completed on all staff prior to their appointments in order to protect children and young people in their care.

The recruitment and assessment officer is responsible for processing all initial enquiries from the prospective foster carers. Then an initial visit takes place to a prospective foster carer's home to carry out a health and safety assessment checks as part of the approval process.

Four foster carers' home's visited are warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children and young people living there. Foster carers are issued with

Carbon Monoxide alarms and they are provided with health and safety training to ensure children's and young people's safety.

A through process is in place for matching children and young people to foster carers who have the skills and provision for meeting children's and young people's individual needs. The foster carer recruitment strategy clearly sets out specific targets to recruit foster carers to increase choice and improve the matching process. The percentage of placement disruptions or breakdown is very low.

A comprehensive child protection policy and procedure is in place which protects children and young people. All fostering staff and foster carers are provided with safe caring and child protection training. There is a system in place for reviewing and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of training on child protection and safe caring. The fostering service ensures that the foster carer has a written procedure for use if the foster child is missing from home. The fostering service makes clear to foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable. A positive behaviour management policy is in place for dealing with children's and young people's challenging behaviours. There is a system in place for foster carers to seek help if an allegation of abuse is made against a foster carer.

The last three fostering panel meeting's minutes demonstrated the correct composition as required by regulation. There are clear decision making processes in place to support the effective functioning of the fostering panel. Panel members come from a variety of professionals and have a range of experiences and they are provided with various training. This further underpins the good work of the fostering service. The current fostering panel chair's two-term service is coming to end in May 2008. A process is in place to recruit a new fostering panel chair.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The service promotes the values of diversity and equality through various training for staff and foster carers, for example, equality and diversity training. Skills to foster training provides opportunities for foster carers to develop various skills in the areas of matching needs, sex and sexuality, behavioural management and health and safety. A good range of resources are available to foster carers with regard to culture and supporting children and young people from diverse backgrounds.

The multi-agency team has overall responsibility for supporting children and young people and foster carers with regard to educational attainment. All Looked After Children (LAC) have an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) and none of the children were permanently excluded from the school in the year 2006/07. Children's and young people's school attendance have significantly improved. Currently 14% of looked after children are attending universities which is higher than national average.

A separate team is responsible for providing short break service for children and

young people with disabilities. Currently 23 households are providing placements for 25 children and young people. A newsletter is published to provide various information for the benefit of parents and short-term carers.

The panel of short breaks is separate from the mainstream fostering and kinship carers. There are networking opportunities between the short breaks service, main fostering service and other stakeholders within the local authority such as health, education and the safeguarding board. Where possible, joint training is arranged and social events are shared. The short breaks team manager informed the inspector that three of their panel members' two consecutive term service is coming to end. They are now in the process of replacing these panel members.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service encourages young people to maintain and develop family contacts. Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining these relationships and are positive about the arrangements made for contact. The service arranges transport facilities for children and young people to visit their family members where appropriate.

There is an appropriate mechanism in place by which to consult the children and young people. This includes children and their family members being encouraged to be involved in the review process. The independent review officer meets with children and young people and ensures that they are given the opportunity to fully contribute to their review. The service is commissioning an advocacy service called VOICE for children and young people. Evidence shows that children and young people have full access to the advocacy service.

The service ensures that children and young people are listened to and encourages them to read and be aware of their complaint policy and procedure. However, the complaint procedure did not include the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted. The service follows the complaint policy and procedure of the London Borough of Richmond. Staff keep records of all complaints received by the service and how these are investigated within the set timescale. All formal complaints are dealt with by a complaint investigation officer employed by the Borough.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Allowances and expenses are paid to all foster carers for enabling them to support children and young people achieving very good outcomes. Foster carers feel valued and children and young people are able to access the additional resources needed to ensure good outcomes.

The Leaving Care Team is responsible for coordinating the young people's plans for

moving on to semi or independent living. The service is proactive for preparing young people for adulthood. The assessment process starts at the age of 16. The Leaving Care Team Manager advised the inspector that Pathway Plans are in place for young people preparing for semi or independent living. In addition to this foster carers encourage and support young people to develop living skills, for example, looking after personal spaces, travelling, budgeting and shopping.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Overall, excellent systems and support for staff, foster carers, children and young people are in place. The service has a clear Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service. The service has developed a guide for children and young people in foster care which is appropriate to the age and ability of the children and young people using the service. However, the Children and Young People's Guide did not include the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted.

The service is well managed with an effective management structure in place. There are very clear lines of accountability in place. There are effective management systems in place for monitoring referrals, completing assessments for approval or disapproval and reviews. Fostering staff are well supported through the provision of training, regular supervision and annual appraisals. A quarterly joint meeting between the fostering team and the Looked After Children's Team takes place to share information and to coordinate works between them for the better outcomes for children and young people.

Children and young people are supported by a good mixture of skilled and experienced foster carers and staff. Supervising social workers conduct bi-monthly supervision to foster carers. Supervision notes cover all areas of individual children's needs, for example, health, education and contacts. Social workers from the Looked After Children's Team visit children and young people at home. Social workers informed the inspector that children and young people also visit them in the office.

Foster carers receive various training in order to develop their knowledge and skills to provide high standards of care and support to children and young people placed with them. Appropriate out of hours support is in place for foster carers. The service arranges transport facilities where needed for foster children and young people to attend therapies, contact meetings and schools.

Fostering carers' case records are well maintained. The terms of approval and foster carers' agreements are kept in the files. Foster carers are clear about what information is required to be kept of children's and young people's files, for example, significant events.

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):

- must add the contact address and telephone number of Ofsted to both the Children's Guide and the complaint procedure (NMS 1 and 11).