

Newham Fostering Service

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

Newham Fostering Service is situated in Wordsworth Avenue, Manor Park London E12. The offices are close to local shops and transport links. The service comprises of three distinct teams. All based on the same site.

The recruitment and assessment team is responsible for the recruitment and assessment of new carers and to ascertain their suitability to become approved foster carers and adopters.

The fostering support team supports carers with the fostering task. They visit carers regularly, keep telephone contact and deal with day to day issues as they arise. This team also facilitates support groups and training for carers.

The role of the placement monitoring team includes liaison with the fostering support team to match in house placements and to monitor placements made in the private and voluntary sector.

The fostering service offers respite care and kinship care as well as short term and long term placements.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was a lighter touch announced inspection which focused on the key standards and the requirements made at the previous inspection.

The fostering service has a qualified and experienced management team, supporting skilled and experienced social workers, support workers and foster carers.

The health and welfare of each child is of paramount importance. The service provides good support to carers to ensure appropriate matches are made and that the child's needs can be met in each placement.

There are sound policies and procedures in place which are well known to staff and carers. Policies and procedures are computerised and are available to staff on line and included in the foster carers handbook.

The foster panel was observed as part of the inspection process, it is fully functioning and deals effectively with panel business.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection three requirements and three recommendations were made and these are now met. Four further requirements and one recommendation have been identified during this inspection.

Newham fostering service has improved the systems in place to review the approval of foster carers. Carers are invited and encouraged to attend their reviews, which take place within reasonable timescales.

There is a children's guide to the fostering service in place.

Issues regarding health and safety checks of carers homes are followed up as part of the review of approval procedure.

The foster carers handbook contains information regarding how the needs of children in trans-racial and trans-cultural placements will be met.

Panel procedures include a section which explains the process to follow when there is a disagreements between panel members.

The above improvements help to maximise the safety of children and young people placed by the fostering service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

In general, carers are given an understandable health care plan for each child at the time of placement, or within reasonable timescales. The plan details how the child's health needs are to be addressed and the roles and responsibilities of key people. Plans include and address any issues that may arise related to the child's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, and religion. Appropriate and up to date health information was not recorded on all files examined.

Children are able to discuss health issues with their carers and with their social workers. Health needs are further considered and reviewed every six months as part of the child care review process.

The fostering service works in partnership with other local key agencies and professionals, such as the children's mental health services and the Looked After Children's health team. These teams give children access to teenage pregnancy nurses, sexual health workers and drug and alcohol professionals.

Good health outcomes can be demonstrated for the majority of children who are fostered . There are systems in place to monitor, review and evaluate the services provided. The fostering service uses available resources to promote good health. It

offers foster carers, a range of support, information and training to ensure they are able to establish good healthy lifestyles for the children in their care. Additional training is available to enable carers to work with children who have special health care needs. Carers are aware of their responsibilities and the responsibilities of other key professionals, in relation to the health of Looked After Children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is a clear management structure within the service and the management team are suitably qualified and experienced. The social work teams also hold relevant qualifications and are experienced for the work they do. Criminal Records Bureau disclosures (CRB's) and references are required prior to a confirmed offer of employment being made. CRB disclosures are renewed every three years.

Children are placed with carers who are assessed and approved to foster. Carers are in general provided with information about the child's family background, their behaviour and their health to enable them to care safely. They are supported to acquire equipment and adaptations so that where specific needs are identified they can be met within the placement.

Support for placements is tailored to meet each child's individual needs. The matching process takes into account all aspects of the proposed placement and includes the needs of others living in the household. The service aims to make appropriate matches in terms of ethnicity, culture and religion. Where this has not happened any extra support needed is identified during the placement planning process. Relevant information regarding trans-racial and trans-cultural placements is available to all foster carers.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place relating to safe care. For example, Child Protection, anti-bullying, behaviour management and missing from care procedures are incorporated into the staff and foster carers handbook and are also available on line. The service follows the London Wide Child Protection procedures. Staff and carers receive regular safe care and child protection training and are informed of any changes in legislation which may affect the fostering service. Suitable procedures are in place to manage child protection concerns and referrals. The fostering service works in partnership with the local safeguarding board, children, families and other agencies to ensure children are protected.

The foster panel was observed as part of the inspection process. The panel serves children well, all panel members have relevant experience and clearly understand the needs of children. They are very much aware of the content of reports presented and are skilled at asking relevant and appropriate questions of social workers and carers attending panel. There is a clear decision making procedure in place. The final decision regarding panel recommendations is made by the agency decision maker.

The panels tasks include making recommendations related to approval and re

approval of foster carers and exemptions and extensions to placements. It also receives information related to complaints and allegations and considers issues, such as deregistration and appeals against decisions made.

Panel members receive induction training and annual refresher training which relates to the panel task. Most panel members files contained appropriate information and relevant references. Not all files included up to date CRB disclosures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service recruits carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children placed. Its policies and procedures value diversity and equality. Children and foster carers are supported by a service which is sensitive to issues of race, gender, religion, language, culture and disability.

Children are supported by foster carers to attend after school clubs. Opportunities are available for them to attend sporting activities, such as football, netball, dance, drama and after school clubs, such as youth clubs, brownies, cubs, guides and scouts. Young people are happy with the out of school support available to them.

Children have Personal Education Plans (PEP's) in place for them. At the start of each placement the child's education is discussed with the carer as part of the placement planning process. Each child's plan details how their educational needs will be met and identifies the specific role of the carer and key others. Children are supported by their foster carer to reach their full potential with regard to education. Young people were keen to talk about their achievements and these were impressive. The service provides an education handbook for carers which includes detailed information about all aspects of the child's education. Where appropriate parents continue to be involved with the planning and decision making process related to their child's education.

Fostering social workers and foster carers clearly understand the importance of their roles with regard to children's educational development. Both staff and carers receive regular supervision and attend training related to the education of Looked After Children.

The service provides short breaks and respite care for children where appropriate. In each case it is recognised that the parent holds overall responsibility and remains the main carer for the child.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

At the beginning of each placement arrangements are made where appropriate, for children to remain in contact with their families and friends. The contact

arrangements are reviewed regularly at home visits and at six monthly child care review meetings.

Initial and ongoing training is available for carers related to talking and listening to children. Carers understand the importance of listening and responding to children, with regard to matters that affect them and impact on their day to day living arrangements. Where a child has specific communication difficulties a suitable communication system is adopted to ensure their voice is heard.

Children are consulted at their child care reviews about their placements and plans for the future. Children are also consulted about the review of approval for their foster carers. The fostering service links with the Children's Rights Service, who provide two consultation events for Looked After Children each year. These events link into and improve services for children and young people. For example, young people wanting to remain in placement after the age of 18 years, are with the carers support able to apply for the placement to be converted to supported lodging. This recent change is a good example of listening to children and acting on what they say.

Children are provided with a children's guide to service at the beginning of their placements, this gives information about how to access an independent advocate, how to make complaints and includes useful contact details. Children who have been in placements for some time could not remember if they had or had not receive a guide to the service.

In general it is clear that children are consulted about their care. Their views are listened to and taken seriously. Young people talk regularly with their foster carers and the carer's support social workers. It is clear that some young people do not see their own social workers regularly and the placement plans do not include dates of visits made.

Children are aware of the complaints procedure. Complaints and allegations are recorded appropriately with actions taken and outcomes. Complaints are handled appropriately within the timescale identified in the complaints procedure.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children and young people are encouraged and supported by their foster carers to achieve independence. Young people are consulted about the arrangements in place for them. They have the opportunity to discuss plans for their future at their child care review and at 16+ pathway planning meetings. Support for young people moving into independent living continues to be available from their carers and through the leaving care services.

All carers including kinship carers, receive full allowances and expenses which meet

the cost of caring for each child. Payment details are fully explored at the placement planning meeting and are subject to ongoing review. Systems in place and policies related to payments are easy for carers to understand and payments are made promptly.

Foster carers ensure that finances are in place for children to have appropriate clothing and toiletries and to enable them to pursue a range of educational and leisure activities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The visions and values of the fostering service are clearly stated in the Statement of Purpose which includes all of the relevant information required by regulation.

Managers are experienced and qualified for their roles. They ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and support good practice. Managers are approachable, available to staff and to carers and young people where appropriate.

There is a clear management structure in place and appropriate arrangements are made to cover any absents of the line manages. Job vacancies identified at the previous inspection have been filled and in general good overall support is provided for staff, carers and children. Supervising social workers hold case loads of approximately 15 cases which is reported to be manageable. There are systems in place to ensure reviews of carers approval are carried out regularly and as far as possible on time. All social work staff in the fostering service have copies of the relevant working policies and procedures for the local authority and these are also readily available on the computer system.

A training and development programme is available for all staff. The programme includes opportunities to train to qualification level. Records of regular supervision are available on staff files. The appraisal system is not up to date and appraisals have not been undertaken within the last year.

Foster carers are supervised regularly and supported by their supervising social worker, to carry out the fostering task. Files contain a signed copy of the foster care agreement, which clearly identifies their roles and responsibilities. A copy of the fostering handbook is given to all carers on approval . There is a training programme in place and carers are encouraged to complete relevant identified training each year.

Case records for children are being computerised at present and information is available in hard copy and on computer while the process is being completed. Information recorded is up to date. Administrative records in general were in good order and procedures for the smooth running of the service were in place. Separate records are kept for staff, children and carers and for complaints and allegations

made. There is a procedure in place for dealing with complaints and allegations and recorded are kept with actions and outcomes recorded. The agency administrative records are well maintained.

The assessment of kinship care arrangements are undertaken in the same way as for all Newham carers and the same support is provided with regard to supervision, training and advice. Once completed the assessment is presented to the foster panel for recommendation of approval.

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
12	to ensure that placement plans for children are in place on the date that the placement is made or as soon after as is possible. All placement plans must include details of the child's health needs (NMS 12.3 Regulation 17(3))	30/05/2008
15	to ensure that all members of the foster panel have an up to date Criminal Records Bureau disclosures that is renewed every three years. (NMS 30.3 Regulation 20 schedule (1))	30/05/2008
11	to ensure that information is recorded on the children's placement plan of visits made by the child's social worker. Information should included how often visits will take place. (NMS 11.3 Regulation 34(3) schedule 6(5))	30/05/2008
20	to ensure that all members of staff have an appraisal which is recorded on their file and is reviewed regularly. (NMS 20.4 Regulation 21(4)(a))	30/06/2008

Recommendations

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

- that the children's guide to the fostering service is made available in a format which will be understood by both older and younger children. (NMS 1.5)