

# KCC Fostering

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC062007
<b>Inspection date</b>	11/07/2008
<b>Inspector</b>	Lucy Ansell
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Kent County Council, Invicta House, MAIDSTONE, Kent, ME14 1XX
<b>Telephone number</b>	0845 3302967
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Kent County Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	
<b>Responsible individual</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	08/01/2007

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](http://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

Kent County Council has 700 foster families who are caring for over a 1000 looked after young people. Around 85% of these are with non relative foster carers, with 15% in relative/friends placements. KCC has invested in its in house fostering service which now provides for over 90% of Kent's LAC population. There are four fostering teams, two in east Kent and one each in the mid and west Kent areas. The fostering team also provides specialist services with a treatment foster care programme, therapeutic reparenting and respite/day care.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection completed over a one week period by a team of inspectors. All of the key standards were inspected, as well as the standards under Economic Wellbeing. Two of the four fostering teams were visited along with two of the specialist services. Overall this is a strong service that delivers good outcomes, with elements of outstanding practice within the specialist services and for positive contribution overall. There is a highly skilled management team, which ensures that all of its services are conducted for the best interest of the children, with committed staff who are able to support the foster carers to meet this aim. Any deficits in services are largely due to resource implications, for example, staffing levels and some standards of premises and levels of payment to carers. Whilst one action and five recommendations have been made from this inspection, those made from the previous report have all been met.

### Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, six recommendations were raised. These were concerned with updating safe care guidelines and reviewing health and safety policies. The service was asked to provide carers with first aid training and to review the supervision of social work assistants. It was also asked to explore the current impact of increased workloads upon the staff. The local authority demonstrated its desire to fully comply with the inspectorate by swiftly addressing all of these points. All foster carers now have first aid as part of the core training to be completed in the first year, policies and procedures have been reviewed on safe care guidelines and consultation with a health and safety advisor is undertaken if there is concern about any presenting issues. The supervision of the social work assistants was reviewed by the manager of the team concerned; they are now supervised by one senior social worker in line with all of the other teams. The local authority is continuing to review its commissioning processes, with particular regards to workload implications and its findings will be used to inform its plans for expenditure in the forthcoming financial year.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Within the last year, there has been a very clear drive to ensure all 'looked after' medicals are being conducted on an annual basis. The figures have significantly improved and continue to do so. Foster carers are acutely aware of their responsibilities in terms of promoting good health and this factor is clearly covered when placements are being planned. All children and young people are registered with local health services and appointments and outcomes are being clearly recorded.

The local authority works hard to foresee and effectively plan for health service deficiencies. A good example was securing a designated dental practitioner for looked after children when the entire county was struggling with an inadequate number of NHS dentists. This has resulted in children receiving the care they need in this area.

Other recent developments include the appointment of designated health workers who can liaise and follow up as necessary, any issues with associated external health departments. With regards the treatment fostering service, all Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) referrals are being treated as emergency appointments to ensure treatment is delivered without undue delay. This has positive consequences for this particular group of young people, however, it is not extended to those in other forms of foster care.

Although records are being maintained by foster carers with regards health appointments and interventions, the service does not supply young people with their own written health record that is transportable should they move placements. The value of introducing such a document is currently being considered.

Foster carers receive training and guidance which enables them to meet the health needs of those in their care. For those children with complex medical needs, additional training is provided, for example, the use and administration of medication and dealing with epilepsy. Thus, children are being effectively looked after by those who have the skills and competencies to promote their good health and well-being.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The managers and staff are all experienced and skilled practitioners for their respective roles. They ensure that children are safeguarded. Safe recruitment practices are comprehensive and thorough with checks and references. However, clear evidence of written references being followed up by a telephone enquiry are not evident in all cases.

Form F Assessments of prospective foster carers are being conducted by those with the appropriate skills and knowledge within the team. Children are placed with carers who have been assessed as being able to meet the child's needs, ensuring the welfare of the child is safeguarded. Fostering households are homely and can comfortably accommodate all who live there. Annual health and safety checks are being conducted but in some cases it is not possible to track that recommendations made by the assessing social worker have been successfully followed through. Each foster carer's 'safe care' policy is subject to ongoing annual review to ensure it remains individual to that child. This is aided by a very clear placement plan, devised by the local authorities documentation and information. Foster carers are supported in acquiring specific equipment or adaptations needed to ensure children are kept safe. In some cases, foster carers have purchased equipment and resources themselves and they are commended for this level of commitment to those in their care.

Matching processes are clear. They ensure children are placed with carers appropriately, within the prescribed processes of mapping meetings, swot analysis and clear referral systems. The documentation in place is being fully utilised, with considerations including the locality, ethnicity, behavioural, educational and contact needs of the referred young person. All such key areas are examined in terms of how the proposed foster carers may be able to meet presenting needs. The ongoing success of the authority in its performance indicators, in securing long term and permanent placement, is indicative of a rigorous matching process being implemented. The outcomes for children and young people are very positive in this regard.

There is close attention to safer working practices in the teams and the children are seen frequently by a range of professionals. The service works well in partnership with the local safeguarding board, children and families teams and other agencies to ensure child protection concerns or referrals are managed well. Staff and carers receive good basic and ongoing training which is reviewed and updated and includes safeguarding, receiving allegations from looked after children and safe holding training. This is further underpinned by clear policy and procedural guidance detailed within the foster carer handbook. The service is mindful that recent legislative changes, including the role of the safeguarding board, means foster carers have had a lot of new information to get used to. A number are anxious about dealing with allegations and working with challenging children and to this end, work is underway to ensure these topics are explicitly reinforced during initial training and beyond.

All of the staff possess the skills, experience and qualifications commensurate with their roles. Those with a social work position are registered with the General Social Care Council. Where unqualified staff carry out a social work function they do so under the direct supervision of a senior social worker who is accountable for their work. Such good practice benefits foster carers.

The panel is organised to be effective and efficient. It consists of a wide range of child care professionals and is currently seeking to recruit a care leaver. The service also recognises it lacks diversity in terms of its membership and is actively seeking to

address this. All members are recruited subject to providing appropriate references and checks. Access to medical and educational expertise is in place. Panel members receive the necessary documentation in good time and forms have been reformatted to evidence carers' competencies. Clear focus is placed upon examining an applicant's ability to promote a healthy lifestyle and questions are routinely asked about their attendance at supervision and training, and health and safety issues. Annual reviews are up to date. The documentation for this process includes seeking the views and opinions of the foster carers, the young people in placement, children and families social workers and birth children.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The local authority has a strong social model of equality and much is invested in the training and support of foster carers in valuing diversity and understanding equality. Within the surveys it is noted that most carers feel the service addresses issues of culture, ethnicity and disability in either a good or outstanding manner. Equality is given due emphasis within the specialist services, for example, much work at present is on helping children who display racist behaviours change to their attitudes and in supporting carers to help children develop a positive identity. Much work is also being completed with birth families to enable them to establish positive links with their children. The local authority has produced a book to enable carers called culturally competent care, and many events are held to celebrate difference and diversity. The demographics of the service is predominantly white British children being looked after and the foster carers do represent this. The authority is seeking to recruit a more diverse range of carers. The service provided to unaccompanied asylum seeking minors is effective with top up services to ensure their outcomes are improved.

The service ensures that carers are given a plan for meeting the educational needs of each child at the time of placement. This plan details how the child's educational needs are to be addressed and the specific roles and responsibilities of key others. The fostering service ensures that all children are supported to do well and to reach their potential. It uses available resources and any additional support or help identified to meet the educational achievement of children.

All staff and carers have supervision and training which gives them the skills to help children achieve good outcomes, and support a child's educational development. Children are benefiting from the placements within the specialised services, and there is evidence of positive outcomes. Outcomes in education, in particular, have been said to be extraordinary, when considering where the children started from. This is also evidence of the commitment and skills of the staff and carers who have been able to support children with such achievements, despite the education department not always being perceived as sensitive or responsive enough. The fostering service ensures that foster parents promote the leisure interests of children placed with them.

## Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Maintaining and developing family contact and friendships are integral to the service provided. Children's views and wishes are sought with regard to contact with their family and friends and young people help to inform the arrangements that are made. The fostering service has developed ways to ensure that foster carers are involved in helping children make sense of their family relationships and to enable contact arrangements to be successful.

Foster carers demonstrate acute sensitivity to the needs of birth parents. Many contact visits are held within the fostering household and carers frequently provide transport and other practical assistance to ensure such visits are enjoyed by the child when other neutral venues are used. Foster carers fully endorse and promote good relationships with birth families and this impacts positively upon the children concerned.

The service has a participation strategy for the full and active involvement of children at every level, including creative methods to enable participation of young people, for example, sitting on panels. Children with experience of the fostering system and also birth children have a role in the planning and delivery of training and in recruitment of staff and carers. They are trained and supported to undertake this responsibility. There are groups and opportunities for looked after children to meet up together. Children are always asked for their views and these views make a difference, for example they had two residential days, for creating a DVD and forming Kent's Pledge for children and young people in care. Children's participation in discussions and decision making about their own futures is fully integrated into service policy and planning and the service has developed imaginative methods of enabling this. For young people who do not want to attend their own review, they can use viewpoint a computer package which records their views. The service has established an effective representation system outside of the social services for children to feed in views and comments. They are listened to and action is taken to arrange advocacy, information and advice, hold social events and encourage young people to attend regular meetings. Foster carers are fully involved in decisions about the child placed with them and are involved as professionals. The setting up of birth children support groups is another innovative way that the local authority has moved forward, along with a multi agency conference on the theme of 'Preventing Placement Breakdown' for foster carers.

Support services to placements are personalised to the needs of children, for example, matching is appropriate in all respite care arrangements. Children have access to a range of support services, including access to independent advocacy. The service responds well to feedback and is always looking for new and innovative ways to make the service better for the young people they look after.



## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

In the main, young people feel they are being encouraged and supported in their preparation for independence. They attribute this to the support and encouragement they receive from their foster carers, who implement placement plans effectively. There are instances however, where pathway plans are not in place and some that are have not been adequately reviewed or updated. This aspect is not the primary responsibility of the fostering service. Whilst many carers encourage young people to save, plan and budget, there is no clear prescriptive guidance in place with regards the use of savings and allowances. However, the local authority does provide a lump sum to individuals when they move onto semi or independent living.

Wherever possible, endings are very well planned, with contingency plans worked out to ensure that the children/young people can move away from the specialist services with confidence and with a good chance of success. However, some carers are frustrated that for older children, the transition into adulthood comes too quickly and that the follow on services are not geared towards working with this particular group of young people.

Clear and effective systems are implemented to ensure foster carers receive payment of their expenses and allowances accurately and on time. A clear structure is in place with regards payments for skills and the service is currently reviewing mileage and maintenance allowances. The service is aware that its shortage of respite carers is predominantly linked to the payments currently in place. The amount payable has not been reviewed for a number of years and current fees do not adequately cover the actual on-costs of providing this service. In addition, there is no prescriptive guidance for children and young people bringing pocket money on such stays and this often results in respite carers paying for trips and outings. They continue to do this to ensure respite stays are enjoyable and are commended for this, despite the fact that they are insufficiently reimbursed. More positively, the payment committee is already actively seeking to address this shortfall.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service. This sets out the services and facilities that are provided. The service also provides two different age appropriate children's guides. On arrival into care a young person receives an information pack filled with literature, for example, how to access an independent advocate and how to complain. This information is available in different formats and languages and is also verbally explained by foster carers to ensure children have a clear understanding of these processes.

Managers are approachable and responsive, whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries and exercising proper management responsibility and clear lines of

accountability. The service and business plan integrates robust quality monitoring and assurance systems, which include effective methods for staff and service user views to be heard. There is an agenda of continuous improvement. The management team delivers an effective service that ensures the service is conducted in the best interests of the children and young people it serves.

Four teams are situated in separate geographical locations and the premises do not always meet the needs of the service, particularly the treatment foster programme in temporary accommodation. In one office the telephone system is obstructive and interferes with other administrative tasks and the treatment fostering team is currently housed in temporary premises. Whilst staff are aware of the potential negative aspects of being separate from their peers and other associated teams, such as children and families, they make every effort to maintain regular and ongoing contact. Invites are extended across teams to attend each others' team meetings and team leaders meet every week to ensure effective communication is maintained. There are instances however, whereby other key tasks supersede these meetings and it is not always possible to re-schedule due to existing heavy workloads. The current staffing vacancy factor, although not critical, is also having a negative impact upon current caseloads, which are exceeding the services own desired maximum numbers. Despite these frustrations, individuals work incredibly hard to prioritise within a continually fluid service.

There is regular structured supervision for staff and carers which combines management and developmental aspects. Staff and carers say they are well trained and supported by supervision, support groups and skills development training. Carers' continued approval is subject to the statutory annual review process and they are initially assessed according to Form F and competency based assessments. They are also encouraged to build up a skills/training portfolio. Recent changes to the annual review process, payments for skills and the requirements of the children's workforce development council means that supervision visits are largely focusing on these areas. Staff are frustrated that they have less time to focus upon other important supervisory aspects and this is further exacerbated by carrying heavy caseloads. Despite this, carers say they feel very well supported and enjoy positive relationships with all of the team members. This is attributed to the team's continued motivation, good use of time management and a desire to provide an excellent service. The inability to achieve this target is due to resources and is not a reflection of the competencies of the team.

Case records for children and young people are held by the relevant children's and families and 16 plus teams. These are comprehensive and contain all of the required and necessary information and can be accessed by the fostering team as necessary. Foster carers maintain diaries, which are checked by supervising social workers and social work assistants. They also produce clear reports and updates which are used to reliably inform statutory review meetings. Clear emphasis is also placed upon the completion of life story work and the foster carer's role in the recording of significant life events with the young person. The formats used for supervision visits are in a constant state of review and update. Staff are not fully satisfied with these as they do not always lend themselves to fully capture the dialogue held and the information

required by the service. A number of carers report similar dissatisfaction with the current diary system as they are not always sure as to how best to use these. Work to improve these documents is ongoing.

Administrative records are securely stored and contain the information as required by the fostering service's regulations. Separate logs are held with regards to complaints, allegations, children, carers and staff employed. These are effectively used for monitoring and quality assurance purposes. The local authority is continuing to update and implement its electronic data base systems. There are mixed views with regards the success of these however, it is recognised that these systems remain in their infancy and much work is being completed to support staff with its use.

Children and young people are benefiting by staying with family members and friends as their primary carers, where such individuals have been successfully vetted, using the same robust processes applied to all other foster carers. The service provides appropriate ongoing support and guidance, which values these relationships and gives these placements every chance of success.

## 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
3	ensure that there is a clear record of all steps taken to assess suitability of staff (Regulation 20(3))	29/08/2008

### Recommendations

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

- ensure the young people have a written health record that is transportable if they move placements (NMS 12)
- ensure recommendations made following a health and safety check are actioned and evidence of this clearly recorded (NMS 6)
- ensure there is a sufficient number of social work and administrative staff to adequately meet the needs of the service and upon successful recruitment, review current caseloads (NMS17)
- review the guidance for foster carers concerning the use of pocket money, savings and allowances for children and young people (NMS 14).

- review the current carer supervision and diary formats to ensure they capture all of the required information (NMS 25).