

London Borough of Hounslow

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid
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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 Hounslow Fostering Service is located in an open plan office in the civic centre. The Fostering Service is managed by a team manager who manages two distinct services: one, recruitment and training for foster carers and two, supervising social work and carers consultation. The placement's service has its own dedicated team manager.

The Fostering Service works in partnership with the Access and Assessment Teams, Locality Teams, Looked After Children Project Team, Futures Leaving Care Team, Social Work Team for Children with a disability, Asylum Team, Hospital Social Work Team and Adoption and Permanence Team to ensure all children and young people looked after are safely and appropriately placed. The Fostering Service aims to work with birth families, and other professionals within and outside the Borough, to achieve the best possible outcomes for looked after children and young people in Hounslow. The service works in a child centred, multi-disciplinary and anti-discriminatory manner.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected.

This is a good service with four outstanding features. Children and young people's welfare is enhanced by good relationships that exist between staff, foster carers, children and young people. Children and young people's health care needs are well met. Children and young people are living in safe environments and they are attending schools regularly. Staff are well supported by the Registered Manager who has commitment to promoting the welfare of children and young people and focusing on improvement.

Improvements since the last inspection

The Registered Manager was asked to ensure that staff and foster carers' Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures certificates and their reference letters are made available for inspection, the service must not conduct any business unless the fostering panel meeting is quorate and exemptions decisions for foster carers are appropriately approved. The duty system and foster carers handbook was in need of reviewing and the service should look at previous inspection reports for independent fostering agencies prior to deciding to place a child with them. The fostering service met all previous requirements and recommendations. These steps help to keep children and young people safe from risk of abuse and ensure their wellbeing.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Foster children and young people's individual health care needs are well met. The London Borough of Hounslow fostering service has comprehensive policies and procedures in place to promote the health needs of children and young people in foster care. The service works closely with the Looked After Children's Health Team to obtain resources required to promote and secure best outcomes for children and young people. The fostering service encourage and support foster carers through the provision of mandatory healthcare training, such as first aid and meeting the health needs of looked after children. The Foster Carers Handbook provides good health information to them.

Foster carers are given clear, easily understandable health care plans for children and young people before their placements. The plans detail children and young people's specific and general health issues that are to be met and by whom.

Foster carers maintain good record of all medical appointments children and young people have attended or refuse to attend. They keep records of all medication administered to children and young people. Medications are stored safely and foster carers purchase first aid equipments so as to promote children and young people's wellbeing.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

A robust recruitment policy and procedure is in place to protect children and young people in foster care. The fostering service carries out all relevant checks on staff, foster carers, and panel members prior to their appointments. Information regarding all relevant checks is kept in the individual's files which are securely stored.

Managers and social workers of the service are well qualified and experienced in the field of the fostering task, child protection and supporting children in needs. The fostering service's team is well established, consisting of permanent staff members who are committed to achieving positive outcomes for children and young people in placement.

Four foster carers home visited are warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children and young people living there. Foster carers are provided with safer caring training and they have purchased first aid equipments, fire blankets and fire extinguishes to ensure children and young people's safety.

A thorough process is in place for matching children and young people to foster carers who have the skills and provision for meeting children and young people's individual needs.

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 safer caring and child protection training. A positive behaviour management policy is in place for dealing with children and young people's challenging behaviours. An appropriate system is in place to monitor the numbers of allegations made about foster carers. All information is collated in one place so that the information can be easily monitored and evaluated.

The three fostering panel meeting's minutes demonstrated the correct composition as required by regulation. The meetings were quorate. Panel members come from a variety of professionals and have a range of experiences and they are provided with various training. However, the minutes did not clarify the reasons for resignation of a foster carer and making recommendation for exemptions for foster carers looking after more children than they are approved for.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The London Borough of Hounslow has a comprehensive policy on equality and diversity. The fostering service promotes this through various training for staff and foster carers, such as, meeting the needs of black and ethnic minority children and working with children with disabilities. Supervising social workers take lead to monitor and educate foster carers on equalities issues during link visits. The publicity and marketing materials of the fostering service provide positive images of looked after children and foster carers in relation to equality and ethnicity. The service promotes sexuality by recruiting and approving foster carers from all walks of lives.

The fostering service promotes education for children and young people. The service closely works with the Looked After Children's Education Team. The service ensures that foster carers are provided with training on supporting children's education and Personal Education Plan. The service provides foster carers who look after children over five with a computer and free connection to the internet to enable them to use information technology as both an educational and recreational resource. Foster carers support children and young people with homework. The service provides foster carers with discounts at various shops to assist with purchasing books and learning aids. Each year Hounslow Young People's Event is held in which the achievement of looked after children is rewarded and acknowledged. Evidence shows that 44% of fostered children have achieved five or more GCSE or equivalent in the last 12 months and six former fostered children are attending various university courses.

The service provides a short-breaks service for birth parents and foster carers as required. Parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs where appropriate.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service encourage children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts as set in their care plans. Foster carers understand the importance of maintaining these relationships and are positive about the arrangements made for contact. A good range of resources are available to the fostering services to promote contacts. Issues raised in contact are recorded and discussed in supervisory visits.

There are appropriate mechanisms 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 officers meet with children and young people and ensure that they are given opportunities to fully contribute to their reviews. Children and young people are given information and publicity about the complaint procedure and have access to advocacy services, such as 'Voice'. The disability awareness training and promotion of opportunities for disabled children makes contribution to the service and the things that impact on their lives and communities. Children and young people organise a 'Total Respect Training'. The training topic includes how to take seriously the views and opinions of them in care and enable them for full participation in decision making about their care and wider service development.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers for teenagers are provided with mandatory training on 'Moving Young People on to Independence'. The Foster Carers Handbook clearly sets out the guidance for foster carers in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. Foster carers informed the inspector that they support young people with learning various independent living skills. The fostering service works closely with the Futures Leaving Care Team. Pathway plans are put in place for all 16 year old looked after young people.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Overall, excellent systems and support for staff, foster carers, children and young people are in place. The service has updated the Statement of Purpose recently. This sets out the aims and objectives of the service. The service has developed Young Person's Guide to Fostering in both written and a DVD format which provides them with information about being looked after and how to raise any concerns or complaints about their carers.

The service is well managed with an effective management structure in place. There are clear procedures for monitoring and managing the activities of the service. There

are very clear lines of accountability in place. Foster carers are well supported through the provision of training, regular supervision and annual appraisals.

Children and young people are supported by a good mixture of skilled and experienced foster carers and staff. Supervising social workers conduct 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.

Foster carers receive mandatory and recommendatory 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. A carer's consultation forum is held quarterly to enable an exchange of views between the department and its foster carers.

Fostering team staff receive both in-house and external training for their professional development. Regular team meetings take place which promotes good communication amongst the staff team. They receive monthly supervision and annual appraisals from their line managers. There are two duty social workers on duty everyday. The placement's service duty social workers receive all enquiries regarding referrals and the fostering team duty social workers manage their own tasks. The fostering team staff are well supported by the administrative team staff.

Foster carers case records are well maintained. The terms of approval and foster carers agreement are kept in the files. Foster carers are clear about what information is required to be kept in files, for example, significant events.

Currently the service has 10 kinship foster carers and they are well supported by the adoption and permanence team. Kinship foster carers informed the Inspector that they do not always receive information regarding their discount entitlements for various shops. The management advised the Inspector that they have sent information to all of their foster carers and will ensure that this information is sent again.

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):

- clarify the reasons for resignation of a foster carer and making recommendations for exemptions for foster carers looking after more children than they are approved for (NMS 30)
- send information regarding kinship children and foster carers' entitlement for discounts in various shops (NMS32)

