

Hampshire County Council Adoption Service

Inspection report for LA Adoption Agency

Unique reference number	SC055359
Inspection date	19/01/2009
Inspector	Sean White / Romana Young
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Hamble Cottage, Glen Road, Swanwick, SOUTHAMPTON, SO31 7HD
Telephone number	01962 841841
Email	
Registered person	Hampshire County Council Children's Services
Registered manager	Karen Parkinson
Responsible individual	
Date of last inspection	23/11/2005

© Crown copyright 2009

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

This is a local authority adoption service that undertakes, or makes arrangements for, all statutory responsibilities in respect of the adoption of children. The agency recruits, prepares, assesses and supports people who adopt children from this country; it makes arrangements with a registered independent agency in respect of those wishing to adopt a child from overseas. The agency provides, or makes arrangements for, the support of anyone affected by adoption, including birth families and adopted adults.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is a well managed, efficient agency that is clear about its responsibilities and how they should be addressed in practice. There is a strong approach to recruiting only the most suitable people to adopt children; this is thorough and clearly focused on meeting needs, including cultural and heritage needs.

There are very experienced and knowledgeable managers supporting highly skilled and motivated staff. Despite some anxieties about forthcoming re-alignment of services there is clear commitment to undertaking duties with enthusiasm and professionalism. All those affected by adoption, including birth parents, and adopted children and adults, receive strong support based upon meeting their needs.

Improvements since the last inspection

This agency has made considerable strides since the last inspection. There have been significant improvements in the overall management of the service, the approach to recruitment of adopters and the operations of the adoption panel. The method of monitoring the needs of children is a particularly strong improvement. The agency's approach to identifying weaknesses indicated at the last inspection and its considered approach to managing improvements and developments is strong.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

This is an agency that is committed to its adoption service being aimed at meeting the needs of children and keeping them safe. The approach to recruiting adopters is well considered, underpinned by a strong procedures and guidance, and aimed at approving only the most suitable families.

Although policies, procedures and guidance are, in the main of a high standard, the safeguarding procedures do not address children who are receiving adoption support services.

People who are able to provide homes for children with particular or complex needs are appropriately prioritised or 'fast-tracked'. There is a well established and considered structure in place for matching children with the most appropriate families through collective analysis of needs and how best to meet them. Successful matching is further strengthened through effective information sharing that ensures potential adopters receive all required and necessary information. There is a strong record of successful adoptions; a significant number of children are placed for adoption and, of these, very few placements disrupt.

The preparation, training and assessments of prospective adopters is thorough and undertaken with due diligence and attention to detail. Reports are well written and reflect the process that adopters have undertaken; this provides the adoption panels with the necessary information from which it can confidently make its recommendations on the suitability of applicants.

The adoption panels, which are all suitably constituted and appropriately managed, have a well-considered approach and undertake their responsibilities with commitment. They are rigorous in their analysis of reports submitted and conscientious about the recommendations they make. The administration of the panels is efficient which enables business to be conducted in a timely and effective way. Decision making reflects the overall thoroughness of the process, which ensures children have the most suitable opportunities in adoptive families.

The managers and staff of the agency with responsibility for the adoption service are all suitably qualified and have extensive backgrounds in, and experience of, adoption. The recruitment systems are robust and ensure that only the most appropriate people are employed; all necessary and required checks are undertaken and there are systems in place to monitor the status of registrations and CRBs.

Workers demonstrate skills in, and understanding of, adoption and social work with children; they clearly understand the legislative framework and the impact it has on children's lives. The work they undertake is of a good standard in most areas with some excellent practices being noted.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There is a strong and coherent approach to supporting families and maintaining successful placements. This is achieved through well coordinated working practices and a strong commitment to providing children with the best possible life chances.

There is a range of facilities and opportunities that families can access and the agency maintains a strong network of assistance and support. This is underpinned by a well organised adoption support service that is committed to providing appropriate services to all people affected by adoption.

The specialist advice available to the agency ranges from good to outstanding. There are independent agencies commissioned by the service to meet particular needs and the in-house advice it receives from the legal team and medical advisors is particularly impressive. This enables planning for and supporting placements through complex health and legal issues to be achieved.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is a sound approach to working with birth families that enables them, should they wish, to be involved in planning for their children's futures. They are encouraged and enabled to contribute their wishes and feelings and every effort is made to maintain a positive relationship with birth parents, in some cases very successfully indeed. There is a positive and non-judgemental approach to working with and supporting birth families and they are assisted in the most appropriate way.

Although there is a clear commitment to maintaining children's history and developing life story work through training and innovation, there is some inconsistency both in the quality and the timeliness in the production of life-story books. Nevertheless, all children have a life-story book and later-life letter at the time of their adoption.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

This is a well managed agency that takes seriously its responsibilities in respect of the adoption of children, and undertakes its duties in a considered and efficient

manner.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong approach to equality and diversity issues throughout the organisation in both policies and operational practice.

The organisation of the agency is informed and driven by a sound statement of purpose, which is underpinned by robust policies and procedures; the guide for older children, however, is generic and adapted for children in a somewhat cursory fashion and is not to the same standard as other agency material.

The agency recruits prospective adopters in an encouraging way that is welcoming and non-discriminatory. The information pack is well presented and provides appropriately drafted information for people to consider.

Managers are well equipped to carry on the agency. All are suitably qualified and have significant experience, skills and knowledge in social work with children in the broadest sense, and adoption in particular. Despite the agency being in the midst of a service reorganisation, which is causing some anxiety amongst workers, the arrangements for maintaining the service's operations and objectives are strong. Workload allocation and management is well organised and efficient which gives workers support and encouragement to undertake their duties to the best of their abilities. The monitoring of the service is particularly well managed with systems in place to ensure that all managers are fully informed of the activities of the agency, the situation of its adopters and all children where adoption is being considered, or is the plan. This ensures that delays are minimised and that due consideration is given to the progress of every case.

The service is currently under considerable pressure and staff have workloads that are barely manageable. The impact of the forthcoming reorganisation should improve staff resources overall, but there is confusion about exactly what roles and responsibilities people will have in the new structure.

The administration of the service, and the infrastructure of systems and resources are very efficient which enables operations to be undertaken in a well organised and professional manner. Case recording is, in the main, good but there was one exception to this that had not been identified in an otherwise well monitored system. All required precautions are taken in respect of access to, and protection of, confidential information. Similarly, records in respect of staff and panel members are well maintained.

The agency operates from several premises throughout the county, and this is to change in the near future. The workplaces are suitable for their purpose but there is no current disaster recovery plan to describe how records can be safely retrieved.

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):

- include children receiving adoption support services in child protection procedures (NMS 32)
- develop training and timeliness in life-story work to ensure children have a full history as early in their placements as possible (NMS 8)
- produce a children's guide that meets the needs of all ages of children whose plan is for adoption (NMS 1)
- produce a disaster recovery plan to ensure the retrieval of records and information (NMS 29).