

# City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Fiona Parker
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<b>Setting address</b>	Adoption & Fostering Unit, 35 Saltaire Road, SHIPLEY, West Yorkshire, BD18 3HH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01274 437343
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
<b>Registered manager</b>	Sarah Patrick
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Kathryn Tunstall
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11/07/2008

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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**

Bradford Metropolitan District Council fostering service is based on the outskirts of the city of Bradford. The authority covers a large geographical area. The fostering service provides a range of services to meet the needs of children and young people. The service assesses, supports and supervises time-limited placements, long-term placements, intensive placements, family and friend placements, short break placements (shared care) for children with disabilities, short break placements (support care) for children without disabilities, remand care and emergency placements. Teams within the fostering service provide the different aspects of the service. Each team is managed by a team manager with oversight from the service manager.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This fostering service is offering a good service to the children and young people of Bradford. The fostering service works effectively within the wider local authority services and with partner agencies to promote good outcomes. The health arrangements are excellent with individual tracking and overview of individual children throughout their placements and excellent support for children with complex health needs. Children and young people are positive about their experiences of being looked after, and foster carers report they are well supported. Overall this is a well-managed service which regularly evaluates its performance to further develop the service in line with emerging needs of the local area.

There are three recommendations relating to: all foster carers achieving the required qualification; appropriate support for all family and friend carers, and the availability of subsequent placements following an emergency placement. One good practice recommendation relates to the availability of personal education plans to identify the appropriate support for all children and young people. These areas do not significantly impact on the outcomes for children and young people.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the previous inspection.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people receive excellent support with their health needs. Excellent links and joint partnerships with health agencies ensure children can promptly and equally access health services. Children and young people's health needs are individually tracked by the looked after children nurse team throughout their lives, which offers consistency and equality.

Community services are integral to supporting children with complex health needs and providing training and guidance to foster carers. Foster carers receive excellent support, training and information to provide good health outcomes, including managing complex medical procedures and administering medication. Strong links with the child and adolescent mental health teams ensure services such as consultations, therapy and learning practical strategies are accessible for children and foster carers. As a result, foster carers support children to make sense of their feelings, anger and emotional trauma from a greater understanding of the links with children's presenting behaviours. Foster carers feel well prepared to meet their responsibilities, and can, and do advocate strongly on behalf of children and young people. Children and young people say they are supported to lead healthy lives; they eat healthy foods 'such as fruit and vegetables', and, 'I play outside often and go for walks and enjoy blackberry and raspberry picking'. Children and young people enjoy a range of hobbies and activities such as swimming, horse riding and mountain biking which promote physical exercise, social relationships and confidence.

Children and young people live in homes which can accommodate their needs and are subject to health and safety checks. The service maintains appropriate standards through supervisory checks to monitor children and young people's welfare. Any bedroom sharing is subject to risk assessment and scrutiny, with a focus on children's current needs and future planning.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people report they feel safe and well cared for. Foster carers are well informed of their safeguarding responsibilities and support children to keep themselves safe. Foster carers report training prepares them well to safely care for children and young people. A comprehensive training programme includes child protection, safer-care practice, physical interventions, building positive relationships, managing challenging behaviours and training specifically tailored to the needs of children with disabilities. Training is also available in additional languages to meet the needs of all foster carers.

Many children and young people report positive relationships with their foster carers: 'I am very happy where I am and love my family'; 'mum gets me everything I need and treats me like their own'; and, 'I love my foster home and I get treated very

well'. Children and young people are not regularly absent or frequently reported missing. Foster carers are clear on reporting procedures and accessing out-of-hours support should young people go missing. The local authority monitors all young people reported missing through monthly strategy meetings which should this occur, includes children and young people in the fostering service.

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

The provision is good.

Children and young people say they are well cared for and treated as members of the family. They say they are expected to keep to the rules in their home and generally these are fair. Foster carers expect children and young people to do well at school and achieve their potential. Young people are supported to achieve, and a range of resources are tailored to maximise children and young people's opportunities to succeed, for example, extra tuition in school and at home. Young people commented: 'I receive extra help with maths after school', and, 'I had help last year when I was taking my mocks'. Foster carers speak highly of the availability of the virtual headteacher and activities to promote aspirations such as summer schools. Children and young people's achievements are celebrated through award ceremonies. One young person spoke proudly of their attendance record: 'I have 100% attendance for three years and I got an award for this.'

Children and young people have ample opportunities to develop, socialise and engage in enjoyable activities and purposeful leisure pursuits both with foster carers, with friends and provided by the fostering service. One foster carer comments on their foster child's progress: 'He has improved social skills and he is getting better with confidence and self-esteem'. The education welfare officer has a specific strategy to respond promptly to support individual young people at risk of school absences and those who require additional support in school. Foster carers understand their role to promote opportunities and education. Tailored training equips carers for children under five to develop an understanding of early years development and for all carers to better understand the education systems. Although there is no significant impact noted, not all young people have personal education plans as part of their overall plan.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children and young people feel they have a voice and can express their views in a number of ways. Children and young people are actively encouraged to contribute to the development of all aspects of the fostering service through a range of consultation activities. For example, young people successfully presented a case to senior managers to not cut a support service they valued. A well-established recruitment strategy actively involves young people in the interviews of workers and managers in the service. Children who foster have regular opportunities to engage in a group to express their views and feelings on fostering.

Carers complete some very good examples of life story work and use time lines to support children to gain a sense of their past experiences, identity and reasons for being in foster care. This includes linking with birth relatives overseas and planning visits to enable children to experience their culture and heritage. Children and young people who are placed long term report very positively about their experiences: 'I get looked after well, they always help me, they treat me as part of the family'. Equally a foster couple comment: 'Our foster children are part of our family and they are treated no differently'.

Carers feel they receive sufficient training and support from social workers and supervising social workers to support children develop resilience and emotional stability. Children and young people feel their views are listened to when planning their future care plans. Foster carers are clear on their roles and responsibilities in placement or support plans and guidance has recently been strengthened in line with the new standards. Children and young people understand their arrangements to see family and friends; in many cases, foster carers play a pivotal role in transporting and facilitating contact where appropriate.

The needs of children and young people result in both planned and emergency placements. The majority of placements are well planned with introductions and visits. Foster carers report they receive sufficient information: 'Usually get information at time of placement or just after as most placements are newborn babies straight from hospital'. Another carer comments: 'The transition between placements is planned and coordinated to help children adapt as well as possible and get to know the carers they are going to.' Equally, supervising social workers report information is available and they can access shared information systems to gain further information to secure appropriate matching.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Children are supported and consulted to plan for their future and towards their independence. Foster carers receive training in supporting children develop through their life changes and during key transition times. Placement planning takes account of any impact of changes upon young people and seeks to minimise disruptions to education and social and family relationships. Young people receive support from the leaving care team between 16 and 18 years of age, depending on their needs and future plans.

Good arrangements support young people to continue living with foster carers into adulthood. One carer comments: 'This is her home for as long as she needs it and beyond'. Support is available to promote higher education with a specific worker in the leaving care team focusing on promoting young people's aspirations in this respect. Funding is available to support young people to go to university or further training. In addition, specific events for children who are looked after are held to inform them about the local university and the support they can expect.

## Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity are at the heart of the service and a key thread through policies, procedures and operations. The cultural diversity of the local area is reflected in the diverse staff team and the recruiting of foster carers. Children and young people's diverse needs are fully considered in matching and a sensible approach taken to children's needs in the short term and the longer term. Foster carers' training is available in Urdu and Punjabi but care is taken not to segregate groups of carers but offer opportunity to reflect on the culturally sensitive areas fostering can raise for foster carers' beliefs. Equally, information is available in different languages and tailored to younger and older children. A carer comments equality and diversity are 'respected core principles of the fostering service which enable it to give the quality of service that it does in all areas regarding employees and fostered children and their families'.

The recruitment and selection of staff are robust; suitably qualified and experienced people manage and work in this service. Continuous monitoring and reflective practice ensure effective scrutiny of the service overall. Equally, the assessments of prospective foster carers include appropriate safeguarding checks, including members of the household and others as required. Assessments are of good quality and focus on prospective carers' capacity to provide safe care for children and young people in line with their agreed plans. The fostering panel is effectively managed, makes timely recommendations and takes its quality assurance role seriously. As such the agency decision maker has robust information on which to make decisions.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Any concerns and safeguarding matters are appropriately responded to and reported in line with the local authority's protocols and arrangements. Partner agencies and foster carers understand and act upon their responsibilities to discuss any potential welfare issues; this strengthens safeguarding arrangements for all children.

This is a well-managed service with the lines of delegation and responsibilities suitably organised to respond to the wide remit of the service. There is strong and effective management and monitoring of the service. The service is under pressure to meet the increasing demands in the local area for placements. The pressures and complexities are well understood and under constant review and scrutiny. Good measures are taken to ensure minimal impact on young people and children, however, in some cases, children remain in emergency placements for a further period while a further placement is sourced.

Importantly, foster carers are very complimentary about the service: 'Fostering is the best thing I have ever done. It is so rewarding to see the children blossom and flourish', and say they are very well supported by the fostering service and partner agencies. There are some shortfalls in providing regular visits to some family and friends carers, where placements are very settled. Training for foster carers is



diverse and suitably prepares and develops foster carers for the demands of fostering. Although a structured qualification programme is underway, not all carers have progressed with the recognised qualification for foster carers; however, this does not directly impact on children and young people.

## **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):

- implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted demands (NMS 13.1)
- ensure equity of provision for family and friend foster carers. In particular this relates to support and supervision of family and friend carers (NMS 30.10)
- ensure all carers, including all members of a household who are approved as foster carers, are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Standards for Foster Care (NMS 20.1)
- ensure the child's care plan, through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) identifies what needs to happen for a looked after child to enable them to fulfil their potential. (Children Act 1989 Volume 4: Fostering Services 3.106)