

North East Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority 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

North East Lincolnshire Council Fostering Service provides a variety of foster placements covering a small geographical area. This includes mainstream fostering, long-term foster care, contract care, remand foster placements and short-term breaks. The fostering service is led by a service manager who is supported by two principal social workers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Young people benefit from an outstanding service that improves their life chances. Young people have access to excellent health services, which means that all of them, in particular children and young people with complex health needs, develop stable and improved health. Young people say they feel safe and the service takes its safeguarding role seriously so that young people are protected effectively from harm. Young people have excellent school attendance and a number of them are exceeding beyond expectations. Young people in further education, work placements and apprenticeships are doing very well and have realistic plans. Carers receive exceptionally high levels of support, which has resulted in placement stability and better outcomes. Young people know how to complain and their active participation group influences positive changes that impact on service delivery. A robust fostering panel ensures that all matters presented are thoroughly scrutinised.

Young people benefit from a well managed and led service with competent staff who are qualified, experienced and well supported by managers who have the appropriate knowledge, skills and competence. Robust and sustained monitoring ensures a high quality, insightful, child-focused service that has capacity to improve.

No recommendations were made as a result of this inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The provider was asked to ensure that the fostering panel includes a member with expertise in education. They were also asked to improve the ongoing training programme for short-break carers to develop their communication skills through sign language training. An independent fostering panel member with expertise in education is now contributing to the fostering panel. The short-break service is now situated in the fostering service and they identified a trained and licensed sign language provider who has delivered training. These improvements enhance services provided to children and young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people receive an exceptionally high standard of support to ensure that their individual health needs are well met. Excellent joint partnerships with health services provide young people with prompt access to health services. Young people's health is closely monitored by the looked after children health team, which ensures that they continue to have equal access to services that meet their individual needs. Young people's carers are very well prepared to care for them because they receive excellent training, support and guidance from the fostering and partner health services. This ensures positive health outcomes, particularly for young people who have complex health needs, who without the intensive care and treatment from well informed and competent carers may have a shorter life expectancy.

Young people who need emotional and behavioural support benefit from excellent services provided by the child and adolescent mental health team. They are well embedded in the work of the fostering service, ensuring a range of services such as consultation and behaviour management strategies, and training in areas such as attachment, therapy and direct work with children and young people. The level of intervention and support ensures placement stability. This is evident through the levels of therapeutic input with individual young people and consultation for foster carers. Young people have good access to sexual health, drug and alcohol services.

Young people say they are helped to lead healthy lives. A recent annual health day was well attended by young people. A number of them said they enjoyed the activities, such as rock climbing and archery, exercise and learning how to prepare and cook healthy meals. This actively promotes healthy lifestyles and promotes young people's awareness about health issues, socialising and having fun.

Young people live in safe and secure, nurturing environments. Carers' homes are subject to health and safety checks, and regular announced and unannounced visits. Young people who share rooms are risk assessed. These measures ensure the promotion of young people's welfare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent support and guidance that keep them safe. Young people say that they feel safe and well cared for and report positively about this: 'she looks after me well, very nice, cuddles me, she gets proud of me'; and, 'they make me feel safe and a part of the family and they help me as much as they can with school and my life.' Young people's safety and welfare are effectively and proactively safeguarded and given a high priority. Carers have developed and implemented individualised safe caring plans to protect everyone living in the home.

Positive relationships, trust and respect developed between carers and young people provide an excellent foundation that enables young people to talk to carers about any of their concerns or worries. Carers are trained in safeguarding children and young people, they take their role very seriously and communicate with the fostering service should concerns arise. Young people benefit from carers who understand and carry out their responsibilities to keep them safe and well.

Young people rarely go missing from home, but when they do, carers take appropriate steps to report them missing. This is closely monitored and reviewed to ensure young people's safety and well-being.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have developed excellent, trusting relationships with their carers. They say that they are made to feel like one of the family. Carers effectively communicate the progress of young people's behaviour, and joint work practices address any issues without undue delay. Young people benefit from clear routines, boundaries and strategies, and carers proactively seek support, advice and ongoing training to improve practice and adhere to the reviewed policies and procedures, in particular physical intervention. This is tailored to meet young people's diverse, challenging behaviours and needs. Carers show strong resilience and express a high appreciation for the intensive support provided, feeling that their views are actively listened to and considered. This ensures low levels of placement breakdown and increased placement stability, which is commendable.

Young people have excellent opportunities to achieve their educational or training goals irrespective of their age or ability. This is actively recognised, supported and promoted by carers who understand the importance of young people having a good education. Excellent joint partnerships with the education team and other partner services ensure that young people are provided with an equal opportunity to enjoy and achieve, whether this is in school or an alternative educational provision. All young people of school age have a closely monitored personal education plan and these are also developed for children under five years old. Outcomes are positive for young people, a number of whom are staying in education for longer, attaining good exam grades and are securing university places, work placements and apprenticeships. A number of young people are achieving beyond expectations and have realistic ambitions and plans for the future.

Young people are afforded a diverse range of opportunities to enhance their confidence. They experience different activities both at home and away. Young people are positively encouraged to develop appropriate friendships and lead active social lives.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people have excellent opportunities to express their wishes and feelings about the way they are cared for and how services are delivered to them. The views of young people with additional needs, including disability, are effectively listened to, acted on and are integral to their care planning. Young people are actively encouraged and most choose to attend and contribute to their reviews. Young people have an independent reviewing officer. They ensure that young people's views are heard and any decisions are clearly explained and reported in a format that young people understand.

Young people benefit from strong representation from the children in care council. Young people meet regularly with corporate parents, senior managers and lead members. Young people say that their views and requests are responded to within a short timescale and they are happy with the arrangements. Young people are involved in a range of activities that influence the service, for example, staff recruitment and delivering training. Young people are adept at applying for funding to enable them to undertake activities which promote their confidence and independence. Young people say that their carers always listen to them and they know how and who to complain to.

Young people agree that they are cared for by carers who express a loving and a caring attitude towards them and treat them as a family member. Young people confirm that they feel well cared for.

Young people benefit from having their individual needs exceptionally well met and a number are making excellent progress. This includes young people with complex health needs and disabilities and a very small number of young people who live with carers who are from a different heritage, culture and religion to themselves. Carers recognise their own strengths and needs. Excellent support and guidance from the fostering service and partner agencies promote young people's resilience, personal identity and independence with a positive impact for a significantly high number.

Young people's contact is actively promoted. This enhances their identity and helps them to maintain their relationships with family, friends and significant others.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people benefit from excellent support to make the transition from childhood into adulthood. Young people are very well supported to develop their independence skills in relation to their needs and abilities and carers may continue to advocate on their behalf. Close and effective monitoring and consistent through-care services provide better outcomes for young people reaching the age of transition. Young people and carers are actively involved in their pathway planning,

which focuses on a range of needs, such as finance, housing, health, education and employment. A large number of young people remain actively engaged in education and have taken up further training and apprenticeships, some of which have been organised by corporate parents.

Young people who wish to continue to live with their carers post-18 years may do so. This is a positive development that promotes their stability and supports young people to make informed life choices and preparations at a manageable pace.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is a consistent feature in all aspects of service delivery. Young people's care, guidance and support are highly individualised, and carers actively promote their needs. Young people are cared for by families who are committed to them during positive and challenging times.

Young people benefit from a very well organised and managed fostering service. Leadership and management are excellent. The service is proactive, regularly monitored and led by a manager who is well supported by a senior management team to effectively carry out the role. The manager has the knowledge, experience and is highly motivated to carry on the service in a manner that is constantly seeking to improve outcomes for children. This is commendable. The manager's support from the principal social workers is well established with a clear remit to provide supervision, guidance, support and quality assurance. This ensures that the team is performing to a high level and achieving positive outcomes for young people. Fostering link workers are well managed and child centred. Staff experience high levels of formal and informal support, morale is positive and they are well retained. Staff can access training opportunities so staff can continue to develop their knowledge and practice. One fostering link worker said: 'I am really proud of this team.'

All personnel employed by the fostering service are subject to a robust and transparent vetting process. This ensures that only suitably qualified and experienced people can work with young people or have access to their information. Good quality prospective carer assessments provide clear scrutiny and ensure they have the competence and capacity to provide safe and nurturing care to the most vulnerable children and young people in the area. Proactive measures are taken to ensure carers are recruited to ensure sufficiency of carers.

Young people benefit from a well managed fostering panel that is independently chaired and functions within the new national minimum standards and regulations and reviewed policies and procedures. The fostering panel ensures close scrutiny of information, makes timely, robust recommendations and provides good quality assurance feedback. This is credible and well respected by the fostering service. The agency decision maker can make clear, well informed decisions based on the fostering panel functions. These measures ensure the ongoing protection of young

people.

Young people are well matched with carers and their complex and diverse needs are met with support. This is particularly noted where gaps in meeting need are identified. Clear, focused communication, information sharing and working together practices promote stable placements and positive outcomes for young people.

Allegations against carers are dealt with in a timely manner. Steps are taken to safeguard young people if it is felt appropriate. Foster carers are well supported. All matters are fully considered and additional guidance and training are given to carers. The fostering service's approach to allegations contributes to the overall safety and well-being of young people.

The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and is up to date. It accurately sets out the fostering service's aims and objectives and facilities it provides. Children and young people can access guides that are suitable for their different ages and abilities. These are created to a very good quality and are child friendly.

Carers are highly complimentary about the support they receive from the fostering service, indicating that staff go above and beyond their duties. Carers say: 'They are supportive if there is a problem. They get back to you if you leave a message. We have our link worker's mobile and home phone number'; and, 'they do regular visits to ensure we have no problems, provide equipment when needed, provide emotional support and training and give us a good amount of information when children move in.' One carer described the support they receive from the fostering service as 'outstanding'. Carers say that the quality of support from partner agencies is excellent and a number of carers do not feel their placements would survive without their involvement. Carers say that they get good out-of-hours support. Carers are well supervised and appraised, and have personal development plans, which enhance their effectiveness. Good training opportunities ensure that carers enjoy new, ongoing and enjoyable learning experiences, and a large number of them have completed the recognised childcare qualification. Carers feel highly valued and are treated as a member of the team around the child and can deliver quality care and protection to young people.

Good administrative processes and very well organised records provide excellent detail of young people's progress, individual care planning arrangements and review.