

# Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering; Family Placement Services

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	03/11/2008

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Kirklees Metropolitan Council operates its fostering services from its office in Mirfield. The fostering team is responsible for approvals, foster care training programmes and the formal supervision of carers. It provides long and short term placements, including pre-adoption and pre-permanence placements, emergency, remand, and parent and child foster placements. There is also a short breaks service and friends and family carers are assessed and supported.

Between 1st April 2011 and 31st March 2012 the service had 324 children in foster care and 193 foster carers.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

Children and young people report that they feel safe and they know who to turn to if they have any concerns. They comment positively about their relationships with foster carers and say they feel part of their foster families. Children and young people's views are frequently sought by the service and consultation and participation is embedded into service development.

Children and young people feel that their lives improve during their time in foster care. They benefit from individualised planning that clearly identifies and meets their diverse needs. Although below the national average, the majority of children are placed with foster carers or connected people. Those children and young people placed outside of the local authority boundary are placed in independent fostering agencies that are judged to be either 'good' or 'outstanding'.

The quality of care helps them to remain healthy, advance their learning and skills and prepare for independence. This is achieved because unplanned placement changes are minimised and as a result the vast majority of children and young people enjoy stable placements.

The fostering service performs well against national comparators in relation to health assessments, immunisations and dental health checks, which are all above the national average. School absences are below the national average and a large majority of eligible young people achieve level 4 in English at key stage 2. Although slightly below the national average, the majority of eligible young people achieve level 4 in maths at key stage 2.

Managers understand the strengths of the service and take steps to address any weaknesses. Some shortfalls are identified however. These relate to placement choice and consultation, foster carer training, access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, recruitment strategy, managing behaviour, monitoring records and delegated duties. A number of recommendations are raised in order to address these matters and help drive forward improvement for children and young people.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. This is with specific reference to placement choice and consultation prior to statutory reviews (NMS 1.3)
- ensure all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, and revise the written policy on managing behaviour. This is specifically in relation to physical restraint (NMS 3.8)
- ensure that children have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including specialist services (in conjunction with the responsible authority) when they need these services. This is specifically in relation to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (NMS 6.4)
- implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service (NMS 13.1)
- increase the number of foster carers who are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers) (NMS 20.3)
- monitor regularly all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the services policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify any patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2)
- ensure that foster carers contribution to improving outcomes for looked after children is appropriately recognised and acknowledged, their status respected and their levels of authority clearly defined. (Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations volume 4 Fostering Services. (2.4)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **adequate**.

Children and young people are of the opinion that their lives improve during their time in foster care. They feel very strongly that they are treated, by their foster carers, as part of their family and that they are able to make progress with their education. Young people report that they are supported in their transition to adulthood and feel confident about taking the next steps to independent living, embarking on careers and continuing their education.

Children and young people say that they enjoy good health, and the needs of those with more complex conditions are suitably addressed. Children and young people confirm that they are supported to eat well and maintain a proper diet, take exercise and get involved in a range of sporting and leisure activities. They say that messages about sensible drinking, substance abuse and anti-smoking are reinforced, and there is advice and support with sexual health issues.

Children and young people say that they are helped to understand their experiences and personal history. This enables them to develop a positive sense of self and contributes to the development of positive relationships with others. Their access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS) is limited however. This creates delay for children and young people who have been assessed as needing this more specialist type of intervention.

Children and young people gave a range of examples of how they are engaged in the delivery of services and they feel that their views make a difference. The ability to make decisions and influence areas of their care such as choice of placement and consultation prior to review are more limited however. This reduces their opportunities to contribute to their care planning in a meaningful way.

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

Processes for assessing, approving, training and supporting foster carers contribute to the stability of placements and improved outcomes for children and young people. Prospective foster carers are subject to comprehensive assessment and preparation training and their applications are scrutinised by a very effective fostering panel that has a breadth of experience, knowledge and skills.

Assessments are brought to the fostering panel well within recommended timescales which helps to quickly increase the supply of foster carers. Decisions are timely and robust which ensures that only those who have a good understanding of children and young people's diverse needs, and can provide safe nurturing environments, are approved.

Family and friends carers confirm that they are assessed fairly and have the same

access to training and support as other mainstream foster carers. Foster carers report that the training they receive helps them to meet children and young people's needs, and that further training, supervision and support helps them to address gaps in their knowledge and skills. They confirm that they are supported to address issues of diversity, and that access to and content of training is good. Only a minority of foster carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards within recommended timescales however.

The placement needs of the majority of children and young people are satisfied by a recruitment strategy which has seen some success in increasing the numbers of foster carers. The recruitment strategy has not been fully implemented in a timescale which meets increasing demand however. This not only limits choice of placement for children and young people, but also means that some are placed in alternative arrangements away from their local communities, family and friends.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

The overwhelming majority of children and young people say that they feel safe from bullying and abuse both in and outside of the foster home. They confirm that they know how to complain, and who to turn to if they have any concerns. As well as routine visits from social workers, they have access to a very active children's rights service, a Children in Care council and a participation officer who is based in the safeguarding team.

Children and young people are protected by the service's clear and effective behaviour management strategy, which means they are not subject to any inappropriate sanctions or discipline. Incidents of physical restraint, although rare, are not sufficiently monitored to ensure that the use of such measures are safe, and the related policy does not provide clear guidance to either staff or foster carers. This compromises children and young people's safety and well-being.

A range of additional safeguarding mechanisms contribute to the protection of children and young people. This includes the effective vetting of staff, health and safety checks, unannounced visits to foster carers, supervision which focuses on the safety and development of foster children and the prompt investigation of allegations and complaints.

### **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the local authority fostering agency are **adequate**.

Children and young people placed with this fostering service experience improvements to their development and well-being across a range of outcomes. This is achieved by a clear management focus on safeguarding, good practice and the generally effective implementation of a range of policies and procedures. The current

interim manager of the service is viewed positively by carers, staff and social workers. She is described as being approachable and responsive, whilst exercising proper management responsibility and operating along clear lines of accountability. She ensures that there is regular feedback on the performance of the service and outcomes for children and young people which is presented to senior management through the monitoring reports that are provided for their scrutiny.

The service is therefore managed well in many respects. There are some sound initiatives and solid plans for moving the service forward to improve outcomes for children, such as recruitment and CAMHS. The implementation of these strategies is not however at a pace sufficient to meet the needs of children and young people. Additionally, monitoring systems are not sufficiently developed to identify patterns and trends in practice or provide comment on the quality of care being provided.

A very large majority of foster carers are very satisfied with the fostering service. Some foster carers are unclear about what authority they have to make decisions however and not all foster carers feel that they are treated as professionals with equal status. For example, foster carers gave instances of 'professionals meetings' being held to which they were not invited. This has a potentially negative impact for children and young people as it means that the people who know them best are not there to comment on their needs.

No requirements or recommendations were made at the last inspection.

## **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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for local authority fostering agencies.