

Brighton and Hove City Council Fostering Services

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This local authority fostering service has 282 approved foster carers in 161 households offering 304 placements to young people. This includes 12 that are short breaks placements. A range of placements are provided including emergency, short term, long term and parent and child placements.

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 **good**.

This is an effective fostering service where young people are placed in suitable, caring homes without delays.

Brighton and Hove have a high use of independent fostering agency placements compared to the statistical neighbour group average and the overall proportion in all local authorities. Every effort is being made to increase the number of in-house placements within the city. However, factors such as limited housing stock are key factors in recruitment of foster carers.

Young people receive high quality care from foster carers who understand their complex needs. Young people make good progress in all aspects of their lives from the point of moving in. They thrive in education, enjoy good health and make good progress in relation to their behaviour and emotional well-being. Young people feel safe and happy. They make strong attachments to, and enjoy positive relationships with, their foster families. They are supported to make progress and achievements. There are low levels of young people going missing and this reflects patterns of young people going missing in other local independent fostering agencies. Placement stability is high. There are good arrangements for assessing young people's needs. Positive links with other agencies help ensure that these needs are well met.

There are strong arrangements for the effective and high quality supervision and support of carers. As a result, they demonstrate a good understanding of young people's needs. Young people's views are central to decision making around their

lives and significantly influence the work of the service. There is highly effective management of the service. Staff are extremely well motivated and committed to positive outcomes for young people. Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service as there is vigorous quality monitoring. This results in effective steps being taken to improve the service. One shortfall has been identified in relation to the records of staff supervision.

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 a written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor (and in particular) the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (NMS 24.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The service has a good matching process that ensures the needs of young people are a priority. As a result, young people are generally very happy in their placements. Staff say that the Every Child Matters outcomes are a very important driving force within the service. As a result, young people's individual needs in all areas of their lives are well met. Young people actively participate in the complex decisions that affect their lives and this contributes to their feelings of worth. Young people form strong attachments to their foster families and develop a solid understanding of their histories. They feel safe in their placements, and as a result, they thrive and make good progress.

There is a strong support network around each placement. Placement stability is achieved as staff and carers are proactive in identifying potential difficulties early. For example, placement stability meetings are convened when a need for this is identified. Staff liaise effectively with other teams within the local authority to ensure effective support is available for carers.

The educational attainment of young people is good. They make good progress from their starting points in placement. For example, there is an expectation that all young people will be in educational placements. Young people lead healthy lifestyles and understand the importance of good health. This is achieved through the proactive measures taken by the agency regarding health promotion. For example, the service works closely with other health professionals and is successful in accessing specialist services for young people. Young people engage in a wide range of activities that broaden their outlook on life. The service has introduced a number of weekly after school activity sessions around music, dance and table tennis and this has proved

popular.

Young people are well prepared for independence. They receive strong support in attaining skills for adult life, and as a result are well prepared for a successful future. Young people are consulted about the running of the service. For example, a children in care council has recently been formed to allow young people to have a voice about things that matter to them. Furthermore, young people have recently asked to go scuba diving as part of the holiday activity programme and this has been agreed. This results in young people feeling valued and listened to.

Quality of service

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

The recruitment of foster carers is seen as a priority for this service. A worker said: 'We need quality care for our children.' Foster carers are recruited from all sections of the local community. The service has been successful in recruiting from minority groups and there is a dedicated worker for this task in response to local need. Every effort is made to increase the number of in-house placements within the city. As a result, the service is working towards having sufficient numbers of suitable carers to fulfil the fostering needs of the community it serves.

Carers say they are given a realistic view of fostering during the assessment process and say the assessment process is thorough and carried out sensitively. They feel they were well prepared and appropriately supported to appear at the fostering panel. Timescales for approval have improved with the advent of the new staff recruitment arrangements. Carers are allocated a support worker shortly after approval and receive support before their first placement. They say they are never pressurised to take a placement if they do not feel it to be appropriate. As a result, carers develop a depth of understanding of the needs of young people and understand how these should be met. Carers say the out-of-hours service is good. They speak positively of the support they receive and say that additional support is always available when needed. There is an effective fostering panel that promotes safe, secure and stable placements.

There are strong arrangements for ensuring that carers receive support to promote the good health of young people. All young people have looked after children reviews and health plans, and their health is discussed at an annual paediatric review meeting. Nursing staff contribute to the training of carers on health issues and this includes alcohol and drugs use. These nurses also undertake specific work with foster families to address specific health issues. As a result, young people receive quality care in line with their care plans. There is a virtual school which provides training for foster carers on the importance of education for looked after children and has produced guidance on how they can make a significant contribution. Additional tutorial support is provided for young people in preparation for their GCSE exams. These measures are effective in helping carers to meet the needs of young people in relation to education. There is a foster care association which is extremely active and provides an effective additional support network, especially for new inexperienced

carers. Positive links between the service and this association ensure that a large number of carers benefit from this support. Regular carer support groups contribute to carers feeling well supported.

There are robust measures in place for the effective assessment of young people's needs. Good information-sharing systems ensure well matched and stable placements. Staff say: 'There is lots of risk assessment involved.' A foster carer said: 'I get comprehensive information that helps me to understand the children's needs.' Foster carers speak highly of the service and the support they receive. They say that training is of good quality and relevant, and as a result they are well skilled to meet young people's complex needs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe and know that they can rely on their foster carers to keep them safe. Safeguarding is a focus of every supervision for foster carers. This helps to ensure that they are clear about their responsibilities for protecting young people from harm. Young people know who to turn to if they have a concern or complaint. As well as their carers and social workers, there are a number of ways for young people to share their worries. For example, young people have access to independent advocacy and some regularly see an independent visitor.

There is a strong focus on safeguarding in the recruitment and preparation of foster carers, including those involved in kinship care. Thorough checks are carried out on all carers and adult household members. There is also training in safeguarding, covering areas such as child protection, health and safety, bullying and young people who go missing. As a result, foster carers understand and recognise the impact of abuse and safe care. Unannounced visits to carers' homes occur annually and these promote the safety of young people.

There are low instances of young people going missing. The service is proactive in protecting young people who do go missing. For example, senior staff attend the local authority missing children's liaison group. This promotes a joint local agency approach to responding positively to young people who are missing.

Leadership and management

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

There is vigorous monitoring and evaluation of quality and this leads to significant improvement across the service. For example, the educational progress of all young people is tracked and extra support provided when required. This helps to promote placement stability. There are highly effective systems for monitoring the progress of young people placed within independent fostering agencies. All independent fostering agencies are carefully monitored and have to supply regular information

about the progress of each young person. A group of ex-care leavers meet with young people placed within specific agencies to determine their experiences. Their findings are shared with agency managers and inform the development of the service.

The engagement of foster carers is consistently integral to planning for individual young people and in service development. Carers say they are consulted with and feel listened to. They speak highly of the managers' surgery and say there are many ways to be heard. A panel member said: 'We take on board what carers say.' Staff are highly motivated and passionate about improving outcomes for young people. They feel valued and play a significant role in service improvement. They say placement decisions are made in the best interests of young people rather than financial. Young people's views also significantly influence service development. They are able to contribute in a way that they feel comfortable with and this significantly promotes their welfare.

There is a clear focus on service improvement at all levels. A positive approach to the recommendations made at the last inspection means that stakeholders now have all of the information they need about the service within the Statement of Purpose. There is a clearer focus on young people's educational goals as all eligible young people now have a personal education plan. Complaints are welcomed, responded to appropriately and contribute to the service's robust approach to improvement. Staff say they regularly use research to inform practice and training. They say senior managers are very accessible and in general they receive good quality and regular supervision. This promotes the delivery of a professional and effective service. However, a small number of staff members have not received supervision notes following supervision in a timely fashion. The high quality training provided for staff helps them to provide care to young people that reflects individual needs. There is close working with partner agencies such as the police and education, and this goes some way to improving the care provided to young people.

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.