

Norfolk County Council Fostering Services

Inspection report for LA 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

Norfolk County Council's fostering service is contained within the Children's Services Department. There are three support and supervision teams, a children with disabilities team which includes the short term break carers, an adolescent services team and a recruitment team. There are 449 approved fostering households, providing 856 approved places. At the time of the inspection there were 491 children placed with the service.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This inspection was announced and looked at the key National Minimum Standards. The service has made significant improvements since the previous inspection. Outcome groups for being healthy and positive contribution are judged as outstanding, while those on staying safe, enjoying and achieving and organisation are good.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection the manager was asked to look at some areas of documentation; ensure that there is a procedure for consultation and monitoring the service in areas such as staffing and the placement of adolescents. The manager was also asked to review some areas of the service.

The manager has made significant improvements in these areas. Documentation is now appropriately kept and there is a very good level of consultation. There has been a significant re-structuring that has helped ensure that staff have manageable workloads and undertake appropriate tasks.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The service promotes the health and development of children. It provides carers with comprehensive health information on the children and young people who are placed with them. There are clear procedures governing the consent for medical treatment. The files that were looked at had evidence of medical consent being granted.

The service provides training on paediatric first aid, which carers are expected to attend. It also provides training on specific health needs (such as autism) that carers

may need to help them provide better care for children who are placed with them and to meet individual children's health needs. Carers keep health records for children.

The service reviews its policies on health; it has recently revised its policy on carers smoking and is reviewing its policy on hepatitis.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The people who manage the service are suitable to do so. They have been subject to the required checks.

The service actively promotes health and safety issues for children being fostered. Fostering supervising workers carry out unannounced visits and health and safety checks of foster homes. Carers receive health and safety training as part of their preparation to foster and appropriate equipment is provided. This helps to make sure that the homes are safe places and that they provide a good standard of accommodation for the children who are placed there.

There is an very good standard of matching children to placements. The service shares information with carers to make sure they are well prepared to care for the children. Information on matching is recorded on the carers' files. There are times when exact matching is not possible, for example in placing some children from specific minority ethnic groups. In these cases the service uses other recourses to make the matching good enough. Examples of other resources that are used includes other carers acting as mentors, the child's extended family, community groups and specific books and toys.

The fostering service works to protect children from abuse and neglect. Child protection matters are covered in initial carer training. In addition carers are expected to undertake specific child protection training. One carer spoken with during the inspection had not done this training, all others had done it. As only a small sample of carers were spoken with, to find one who had not done child protection training is a significant proportion. This has the potential to compromise children's safety, with regard to child protection matters.

The service takes allegations made against carers seriously. As part of a new safeguarding procedure carers who have been the subject of allegations are taken back to the fostering panel following the conclusion of the investigation. This provides the service with a formal opportunity to consider any implications for the children in its care. When necessary carers are de-registered. Carers are provided with support during investigations through the provision of an advice and mediation worker, employed by Fostering Network, but funded by the fostering service. Some confusion over the new safeguarding procedure lead to a delay in one child protection investigation (along with other factors outside of the service's control). As no children were in placement at the time, this did not have a negative impact on

any children. Allegations are monitored to look for any concerning patterns or trends.

The service ensures that the people who work for it are suitable by having a good recruitment process. All of the recruitment checks required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are undertaken. This is an important factor in protecting children from contact with unsuitable people.

Fostering panels work well. They are willing to challenge the fostering service staff and to recommend the de-registration of carers when necessary. Training is provided for the foster panel members. New members receive an induction pack and two days induction training. Panel chairs and panel advisors have additional training days together.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service values diversity. Diversity is covered in the initial skills to foster training course and in subsequent training. Potential carers who are not able to share the services commitment to diversity are not approved.

There is a good service for children with disabilities. Carers are provided with specific training to meet individual children's needs. Children are encouraged to fulfil their potential.

The service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of children. It provides support for children who are not in formal education and expects carers to take an active role in encouraging children in education. Some carers have been provided with computers to help with the children's education, but this is not consistent. For children doing GCSEs lack of access to a computer may have a limiting effect.

The service has policies and procedures implemented in practice to meet the needs of children receiving short term breaks. Some children who receive short term breaks completed surveys as part of the inspection. They made positive comments about the service. The service recognises that parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs of children who receive short term breaks.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service promotes contact for the children who it cares for. Foster carers recognise the importance of contact for children. Contact arrangements are recorded on children's records and there is good practice in promoting contact in individual cases. Consideration is given to safeguarding the welfare of children during contact. Carers are aware of the need to monitor and record children's behaviour after contact.

The service is outstanding in the way it promotes consultation. It sends an annual questionnaire to carers; in addition to this the carers' support workers ask their views on how the service is working and what training they feel they need. Children are spoken to by their social workers, independent reviewing officers and fostering support workers. Norfolk Children's Services Department runs a KICT (Kids in Care Together) group, which includes children who are fostered. Staff from the fostering service meet with this group on occasions.

Norfolk Children's Services Department have also undertaken a peer research project called the Enlighten project. Three looked after children were trained to interview other children, a questionnaire was used and a report produced. The report included messages and recommendations from the research. This is a significant commitment to consultation with children and young people. There is a group for the birth children of carers as well as carer support groups and a specific support group for family and friends as carers.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, which is regularly reviewed. There is also a children's guide.

Senior managers monitor the service and make changes to improve the service. Monthly monitoring forms are completed by team managers and sent to the policy officer and senior managers. Staff are managed in a way which delivers an effective and efficient service. There is a clear management structure and the managers have appropriate skills and qualifications. There is good staff retention and staff are positive about the service and their managers. The service has an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff. Although staff are busy they are currently able to perform their jobs appropriately. However, if current workloads continue, some aspects of the service has the potential to suffer, for example staff do not currently have time to recruit additional carers for children with disabilities. Staff are well supervised. The quality and commitment of managers and staff helps to ensure that the service runs well and that children are well cared for by the service. There is a thorough assessment of carers.

There is a good quality training programme which includes the use of carer-coaches, specific training for family and friends as carers and carers for children with disabilities. Training takes place at venues and times that are most likely to be

convenient for carers. There is an emphasis on improving the service and the care of children.

The service has a clear policy on working with carers. In general the role of the supervising worker is clear to carers and the workers. Supervision of carers is generally good, but one carer could not remember having any supervision and the file did not have any records of supervision. Out of hours support is available to carers and a good level of support is provided by the service staff. This helps carers to provide a good level of care for children.

There are comprehensive records for children as well as staff, carers, complaints and allegations. Carers are given guidance on recording and support workers regularly review the carer's records. These records help children to understand of their past as well as providing information which is useful in reviewing their care.

The service recognises the particular relationship and position of family and friends as carers, whilst at the same time having the safety and wellbeing of children firmly in mind. Where there is a question about the willingness or ability of family and friends as carers to meet the required standards, this is addressed through carer supervision or, in extreme cases, registration decisions.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
13	ensure that foster carers are provided with such equipment as may be necessary to meet the educational needs of children placed with them (Regulation 16(2))	30/06/2008

Recommendations

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

- monitor staff workloads to ensure that there are an adequate number of staff (NMS 17.1)