

# Sheffield City Council Fostering

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham / David Morgan
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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**

Sheffield family placement service provides foster care as part of a full range of accommodation for looked after children and young people.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The fostering service promotes the health, welfare and safety of children and young people well. Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Their safety and well-being are promoted effectively and young people say that they feel very safe in their placements. They receive encouragement and support to attend school and improve their attainment levels. They enjoy participating in new experiences and developing new skills. They develop confidence and self-esteem. They contribute to decisions made in their daily lives and to statutory reviews of their care plans. They learn the skills they need for future independent living. Children and young people are happy in their foster families and many said they feel like part of the family.

The assessment of foster carers is good and provides a balanced and evaluative narrative. This enables the panel to make recommendations based upon clear information provided to them. Foster carers receive a good level of support and have access to a range of training opportunities. This enables them to develop their understanding and skills in supporting young people and promote positive outcomes for them. Some carers said that on occasions there has been a delay in receiving appropriate information with regards to young people placed. However, the fostering service has been proactive in obtaining information to ensure that the needs of the young people are clearly identified. Not all foster carers have received information and agreement with regards to delegated authority to enable decisions for young people to be made in a timely manner. The service is aware of this and plans are in place to ensure that delegated authority is in place and clearly understood by all carers.

The educational needs of young people are promoted and foster carers are aware of their role in ensuring that young people are supported with their education.

The service has a clear development plan in place. This identifies how the service is going to develop and progress to meet the needs of children and young people.

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

There were five shortfalls identified at the previous inspection. These have been addressed to improve outcomes for children and young people in foster care. Young people are involved in effective pathway planning and consulted about their future

needs. Written foster placement agreements are in place and these are all being updated to reflect the change to legislation. The fostering panel is provided with a management overview of the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews. All foster carers are supervised by a named qualified social worker.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Young people are supported effectively to have their health care needs met. Health assessments are undertaken in a timely manner following admission to the service, and the majority of children and young people attend annual health care assessments. Foster carers ensure that children and young people are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians. Young people confirm they are encouraged and supported to attend medical appointments that meet their needs. Their emotional health and well-being are promoted and they have timely access to psychological support.

Foster carers receive training on a wide range of health matters and this ensures that they have the necessary knowledge and understanding to provide effective support in meeting the health care needs of the young people. Where specific health care knowledge is required, specialist and individual training is sourced and provided. One carer said: 'I was provided with excellent support from the nurses at the hospital to ensure that I understood how to support the health care needs of the child placed with me.' Children and young people said that they were confident that if they did not feel well, their carers would make sure that they were supported well. One young person said: 'My carers really look after me and if I don't feel very well they make an appointment with the doctor and make sure that I am alright.'

As part of the initial assessment, potential carers' homes are visited to ensure that they have appropriate accommodation and facilities to meet the needs of any young person placed with them. The service also undertakes annual health and safety checks of carers' homes. This ensures that young people live in accommodation that is comfortable and provides them with appropriate facilities.

The fostering service effectively supports health promotion for all young people. The service provides a discount card for children and young people to access sport and leisure activities across the city and other neighbouring local authorities. Young people said that they enjoy taking part in a range of sporting activities. One young person said: 'I have a really active lifestyle and I am always doing some kind of sport or activity which I really enjoy.'

Foster carers promote healthy eating. Children and young people spoken with during the inspection had some very positive experiences of learning to cook and to understand about health promotion. One young person said: 'Of course I can still have some sweets and snacks but I have learnt to balance that with eating proper meals and I now enjoy making some of the meals with my foster carer.'

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people report they are safe in their foster homes and all said they are very well looked after and feel they belong in their foster families. One young person said: 'I know that my carer is always there for me and I feel really safe living here.' The fostering service ensures that foster carers actively promote the welfare of the children and young people that they care for. Foster carers are aware of the importance in supporting young people to develop and grow and to take appropriate risks as part of their ongoing development. One young person said: 'My carers ensure that I am safe and they have provided me with information and support about staying safe when I go out.'

All foster families have a safe care policy. These are comprehensive documents and are reviewed on an annual basis or sooner if required. In addition, a safe care policy specific to each child is in place. All foster carers undertake training with regards to safe caring and safeguarding. This ensures that all carers have a good understanding of safeguarding issues. This promotes the safety and well-being of children and young people.

The local authority has developed excellent procedures regarding children and young people who go missing from care. These have been developed in conjunction with the South Yorkshire Police and the UK Borders Agency. This has significantly improved exchange of information, and the number of children reported missing from home has decreased. The service also works with a voluntary organisation that has dedicated workers who provide independent support and advice for children and young people. Foster carers are aware of the procedures to follow and this further ensures that the safety and welfare of children and young people are promoted.

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

The provision is good.

Foster carers have excellent training opportunities to develop their professional skills and knowledge. This enables them to promote the rights of the children and young people. Young people are enabled and supported to develop a range of life skills and experiences. This means their social and emotional needs are promoted and they are enabled to develop appropriate friendships with peers and positive relationships with their carers. One young person said: 'My carer really supported me and enabled me to continue my education. There were times when I wanted to give up but she supported me through it and I am really pleased that she did.' Another young person said: 'My foster carers have always encouraged and supported me to do my best and I am really pleased that they have.'

Foster carers say that their views and opinions are valued and consultation with the service has continued to get better. However, although carers have some agreed authorisation and decision-making authority, full delegated authority is not in place

for all carers. This means that there are some restrictions on making timely day-to-day decisions, for example, authorisation for school trips. Foster carers report that the service is responsive when requests are made. The fostering service is in the process of ensuring that delegated authority is in place. This will ensure that there are no delays on day-to-day decisions being effectively made.

The fostering service ensures that all children and young people are supported to do well and to reach their potential. Foster carers are provided with an information book and training regarding the education of children and young people. This details the roles and responsibilities for social care and education, including information about the looked after children education services. There is a virtual school with an appointed headteacher and senior leadership team. This ensures that all children and young people are provided with educational opportunities, and exclusions from school have significantly reduced. All children and young people have personal education plans. These are reviewed within the statutory review process and ensure that educational achievements are monitored effectively.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people report they are listened to and their views are taken into account in day-to-day decisions and future planning. There are a number of participation and consultation routes in place for children and young people. These include a peer-appointed council of young people who represent the wishes and views of looked after children, monthly consultation groups, and the opportunity for children and young people to speak with senior managers, the director and local councillors through drop-in sessions. Children and young people have also been involved in the recruitment of the independent reviewing officer. This level of participation enables them to play an active role in the services provided by the local authority. The young people spoke extremely positively of the support, consultation, and involvement in the local authority that participation provides. They describe the support they get as excellent.

The fostering service also works closely with birth children of foster carers. A birth children's group is held on a regular basis to ensure that they have the opportunity to discuss issues and also have the opportunity to take part in a range of activities. The children and young people value this group. One young person said: ' I do lots of activities which I enjoy and I can discuss anything with the staff if I want to.'

Contact arrangements are clearly set out in placement plans. Contact visits take place in line with court directions. In some cases the level of contact for individual children is high and requires considerable resources to ensure it takes place. Nonetheless, the fostering service is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities in this regard.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are supported with their transition into adulthood. Effective pathway planning enables young people to develop their skills, knowledge and experience of independent living. The majority of pathway plans are completed within appropriate timescales. This enables there to be an appropriate timeframe within which to provide appropriate support to young people. Foster carers receive training on how they will support young people to make the transition into adult life and independent living. One young person said: 'My foster carer really encouraged and supported me to continue with my education to enable me to secure a better future for myself.'

Young people are encouraged and supported to continue with their education and the authority also provides an apprenticeship scheme offering 100 apprenticeships within the council.

The fostering service works in partnership with public and private housing to respond effectively to the accommodation needs of the young people aged 16 and over.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The service has a detailed recruitment and selection plan in place to ensure that foster carers recruited reflect the ethnicity and needs of the young people for whom a service is provided. Children and young people are actively encouraged and supported to have a voice in the ongoing development of the service. There is opportunity to speak with senior managers and council members to discuss their wishes and views, enabling young people to play an active role in the development of services for looked after children.

Recruitment strategies are in place to ensure that there is ongoing recruitment to meet the ongoing demand for placements. The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and contains the aims and objectives and is an accurate reflection of the service. There is a children's guide, and information is provided in a number of age-appropriate formats. The information is also provided in alternative formats for disabled children and young people and these are currently being reviewed and updated.

Foster carers feel well supported and express a strong commitment to working for this local authority. They have access to training events, the foster carers' forum and many have obtained appropriate qualifications. Young people benefit from living with carers whose practice is well informed and up to date.

The fostering panel provides robust scrutiny of foster carers' assessments and reviews. Potential foster carers' assessments identify core competencies and are evaluative to demonstrate how positive outcomes for children and young people will

be promoted. Panel minutes reflect discussions held during the panel meetings.

Matching considerations are well managed. Weekly placement meetings are held to help identify potential matches. There is strong evidence to indicate that the number of disrupted placements is relatively low, which indicates that the matching process is working effectively. Where a match cannot be found within the fostering service, the authority uses local independent fostering agencies to make up the shortfall. The authority is committed to providing financial support to such placements, particularly where permanency is being considered.

Foster carers say that in most cases, they receive information with regards to the young people placed with them. However, some carers say that there has been a delay in receiving all relevant information in a timely manner. They say that the fostering service has been proactive in following this up to enable them to have a clear understanding of the needs of the young people.

The fostering service is managed very effectively and has a strong and stable senior management team. The fostering social workers feel well supervised and supported in their work. They are encouraged and supported to access ongoing training. This ensures that their skills and knowledge are updated and enables them to reflect on practice issues. All personnel employed by the fostering service are subject to initial and ongoing robust vetting.

Records maintained by the fostering service are stored securely. The fostering service's offices and administrative systems are suitable for the service provided and are secure.

## **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):

- ensure that foster carers are given authority to make day-to-day decisions regarding health, education and leisure, except where there are particular identified factors which dictate to the contrary (Volume 4, statutory guidance, 3.10)
- ensure that foster carers receive a copy of the child's placement plan that is made within five days of the placement. (Breach of Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, Volume 2, part 3, section 9 (2))