

Rutland County Council Fostering service

Inspection report for la fostering agency

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Inspector	Trisha Gibbs
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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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

Rutland fostering service is based in Oakham and is placed within Rutland's Children's Services. There are currently 18 carer households providing placements for 10 children. Some carers also provide flexible day-care and respite to support placements. The small group of carers provide a wide range of placements including long and short term, mother and baby and kinship care.

Summary

This inspection was announced. This was a proportional inspection following a full key inspection last year. Full consideration was given to pre-inspection documentation submitted by the service. Other files and records were referred to during the inspection. The managers and some of the staff team were interviewed. Carers were not visited on this occasion but carers were consulted at a carer support group meeting. The Fostering Panel was not observed but the Chair was consulted by telephone and recent Panel minutes inspected. An Independent Reviewing Officer was also interviewed by telephone. Rutland fostering service continues to utilise a small group of carers to creatively provide good placements. The carer group is increasing and carers with new skills are providing a valuable addition to the body of more experienced carers. The fostering team works closely with the fieldwork team to provide very good outcomes for children in their health and education. Very good attention is given to providing safe placements and children are appropriately consulted by social workers and carers. Carers are provided with a very good training programme and very good support systems. Innovative work is being undertaken to increase family and friends placements with some success.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No requirements or recommendations were made on the occasion of the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health needs of children and young people are very well met. Individual health needs are appropriately detailed in Looked After Children paperwork and other planning documents. Carers maintain details about children's health appointments and essential routine health checks on a separate health file. This record captures important health information that will move with them when they leave the placement. Full health assessments are undertaken on an annual basis and these and other routine medical checks are up-to-date. Health care needs are routinely discussed and monitored during carer's monthly supervision. Extra funding is provided by the service for some leisure activities. Children are supported by carers to enjoy activities that will promote their health, including swimming, riding and football. Carers have all received first aid training in addition to other courses that relate to good health. These include sexual health and mental health awareness. Some young people have been referred to Community Adolescent Mental Health Service team for assessment. Carers also have access to advice and support from this team.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The service is managed by two qualified and experienced social workers, both of whom have an additional management qualification. Staff recruitment and selection processes are clear and appropriate processes have been followed for the most recently appointed team member. Carers have a very good awareness of the need to keep children safe. Very good safe care plans, placement risk assessments and health and safety checklists are in place. These are regularly monitored and reviewed in supervision. Carers have been provided with training about allegations against foster carers this year. They demonstrated a good understanding about the impact of allegations and the role of the safe care plan. Carers are also routinely provided with training on safeguarding matters in addition to other training that relates to the impact of abuse. No children in placement share bedrooms. All carers are visited twice a year on an unannounced basis. Good matching processes are in place. Fostering social workers work closely with field social workers to identify appropriate placements for children. Records evidence excellent matching considerations where placements are of a planned or longer term nature. The small carer group has become skilled in providing a range of placements and work together to support identified placement shortfalls. The development of the family support service has ensured that in the first instance family and friends are where possible included in discussions about placements. Where appropriate children might be matched with extended family members. There have been some changes in the Fostering Panel membership. An appropriately experienced and qualified new chair has been appointed in addition to some new panel members. The panel continues to be properly constituted. Panel records show that the panel takes on a good quality assurance role as well as reviewing thoroughly the panel business. The panel training day this year focussed on permanency planning.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Carers are provided with training on equality and diversity. Where children and young people have additional placement needs, carers work hard to support these. Managers have noted a shortfall in placement choice for children who have complex disabilities and continue in their effort to recruit for suitable carers. Currently the respite service is provided through day and overnight care. All children have a Personal Education Plan and are attending school or college. There are commendable examples of carers taking the initiative to support young people's educational needs. Some carers are working very closely with schools to maintain tenuous school placements. Some young people are receiving extra tuition. Examples were seen of individual educational achievements. Carer records and supervisions show that children's education is prioritised and given very good attention. Children's files also indicate good partnership working between social workers, school staff and carers.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Carers actively support and facilitate contact arrangements. Records confirm that these are risk assessed, evaluated and reviewed by the child's social worker. Carers discuss and feedback contact issues within their supervision sessions and report outcomes in their own records. There are good examples of carers support positively impacting on the parent-child relationship. Links with family members are also actively considered and promoted through the family support service. Children actively participate in these meetings where possible and appropriate. Very good training for carers and workers has been provided this year with regard to contact arrangements, and memory and life story work. Young people are provided with information

about how to make a complaint and about the role of the participation (children's rights) officer. They are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews unless this is deemed by key workers as not being appropriate. They are consulted by their social workers at the time of carer reviews and a new form has been added to the carer's review to represent their views. Carers also advocate on their behalf. The County Council Corporate Parent visits all Looked After Children on an annual basis. Given the size of the small carer group, carers share a very good knowledge and understanding of each others placements. This ensures that if and when children attend for weekend respite breaks the carers have a real awareness of their likes, dislikes and needs. Very good examples were seen of carers consulting with young people in placement.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

This outcome was not inspected on the occasion of this inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose provides good clear information about the service and is updated on a monthly basis. Children are provided with age-appropriate leaflets and additional booklets. There have been some changes to the organisational structure of the service since the last year. Although the head of inclusion has overall responsibility for the fostering service, a family support team leader now supervises the two senior supervising social workers. The two senior supervising social workers continue to be responsible for the day-to-day management of the service. A full time family support service worker and a part-time supervising social worker also form part of the fostering team. Lines of accountability are clear and the staff team are well supervised and provided with good professional training opportunities. The fostering team are very well qualified and experienced in the field of child-care and child protection. Good administrative support is provided. The service continues to recruit new carers. Between them the carers have a good mix of skills and experience to accommodate the range of placements needed. The service has recently had capacity to provide appropriate placements for young people who were previously placed out of county. The role of the family support officer and use of family group meetings has increased the number of kinship carers. Carers are provided with a very good relevant training programme, some of in-house and some external, presented by professional national speakers. Some carers felt that given the spread of the county and location of some training (shared with neighbouring authorities) attendance could be difficult, but the training was highly valued. The service is piloting the new Children's Workforce Development Council induction programme in the new year. Carers receive a high level of support and good quality monthly supervision. Many made positive comments about the accessibility of managers and of the swift response they receive if there is a crisis. The fostering team works alongside the children's fieldwork team and this has impacted positively on placement stability. The teams work well together to maintain placements and to support carers when the need arises. There is a well-attended monthly carer support group. The managers attend for some of this. Carer allowances meet the Government national minimum allowances criteria and enhancement payments are currently being reviewed and clarified. Records are maintained to an excellent standard and account well for the care of Looked After Children. Both fostering files and children's main files provide good information about planning processes and decision making. Key documents are well organised and assist with the tracking of a child's care experience. Carers maintain daily or weekly logs as appropriate. They now also complete

a very good six-monthly summary sheet that can provide essential information for the LAC review meetings. The appointment of a family support officer who manages family group meetings and supervises kinship carers has significantly enhanced the service. Systems are in place to recognise the potential role of family and friends at the time of any placement referral. Family members are invited to participate in decision making processes and this has had positive outcomes over the last year.

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 meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for la fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12).

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.