

East Midlands Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC044607
Inspection date	22 October 2007
Inspector	Fiona Parker
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	20 July 2006

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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

The East Midlands Family Placement Service is part of Barnardo's, which is a registered charity. The fostering project was set up in 2001 and works in partnership with local authorities across the East Midlands Region. The agency provides long-term placements for children and young people up to 16 years of age at time of placement. Short-term, medium-term and respite is also offered to children and young people within the agency and to support other children in their current situations when referred to the agency. The agency assesses and approves foster carers in addition to providing support, supervision and training for all current foster carers.

Summary

Children and young people present as happy and settled in their placements and have formed good relationships with their foster carers. Foster carers feel they are fully supported with all aspects of their role and value the relationship they have with the workers and manager. Robust policies and procedures are in place to underpin all the business of the agency. The manager and workers are suitably experienced and qualified. Regular management overview of all aspects of the agency is in place and systems collate information to monitor the outcomes for children and young people. Further work is needed to ensure children and young people's health information is consistently evidenced in records. Safe care policies did not always include specific strategies in place to evidence the safe care young people receive. Panel minutes did not reflect the reasons for the recommendations for the approval of prospective foster carers with full consideration to the strengths and weaknesses.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The panel minutes contain some more detail of the discussion that takes place when considering the recommendation to approve prospective foster carers. A health recording system has been developed to record all children and young people's health information. This is not yet fully implemented.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people's health and development is fully promoted, they have access to health services including specialist services to ensure their needs are met. Foster carers are pro active in arranging appointments, meeting health professionals and supporting young people to receive services. Young people report they feel their health needs are met and foster carers value the support the agency provides for them. Records show foster carers consider the day-to-day health needs for example, providing opportunities for daily exercise such as cycle rides and walks. A system is in place to ensure health information is fully recorded and this meets the standard, however this is not consistently implemented in practice. Therefore the evidence is not always available to confirm the services available for young people, the appointments they have attended and the outcomes of specialist assessments.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children and young people's welfare is promoted through maintaining regular checks for all workers and foster carers. The service is managed by a suitably qualified person who has successfully met the registration criteria for a registered fostering service. Systems are in place to renew enhanced criminal record bureau checks (CRB) every three years for foster carers, workers and panel members. Young people live in comfortable, warm and welcoming homes with foster carers who fully understand the health and safety needs of young people. Safe care policies are in place to provide safe boundaries for children and all family members. Some policies could contain details on specific strategies for individual children to evidence fully the safe practice in place. Recruitment procedures are robust and records show workers are experienced, trained and qualified. Recruitment files are detailed and contain relevant checks and information. One gap in employment history found was quickly explained and recorded during this visit. Workers demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding of young people's needs, supporting foster carers and working within policies and procedures. Careful consideration is given to ensure young people live with carers who can meet their needs. Records show thorough information sharing, planning meetings and carefully planned introductions take place. Detailed placement agreements specify arrangements and expectations of all parties. Foster carers report they are supported with additional training and relevant information to ensure they are fully prepared to care for young people. Policies and procedures are in place to safeguard children and training is provided for foster carers on recognising signs of abuse and how to respond if young people are missing. Foster carers demonstrate good levels of understanding about the vulnerability of young people and what appropriate consequences for unacceptable or unsafe behaviour could be, for example, grounding or removal of mobile telephone. Guidelines are clear for foster carers on acceptable consequences and records show allegations rarely occur, appropriate procedures are in place and followed in all potential safeguarding circumstances. Arrangements for panel are fully organised and policies and procedures are clear and robust. Records show panel members are experienced and safely recruited including CRB checks. Panel members have clear contracts and guidance on the role/expectations. Minutes evidence that foster carers reviews are fully considered at panel. Minutes did not always provide clear reasons to support the recommendations made to approve prospective foster carers. Minutes did not fully reflect prospective foster carers skills and competencies to provide care for vulnerable children. Potential weaknesses are not fully considered to identify further areas for support.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people's individual ethnic and diverse needs are promoted through clear policies for foster carers and workers in respect of equality and anti-discriminatory practice. Training is provided for carers which sets out the principles for working positively with all young people. Foster carers report specific support from the agency for individual children, for example attending conferences and access to information to increase their knowledge. Records evidence individual work takes place with young people who are in need of support with their identity. Agency documents use appropriate language and all file information is respectfully recorded in line with the value principles of the agency. Workers are knowledgeable in different cultures and use this knowledge for the benefit of young people and foster carers. All young people have equal opportunities for involvement in activities, clubs and hobbies in line with their individual interests. Young people are supported to achieve by fully committed foster carers who recognise their individual potential. Young people regularly attend school and are positive about learning, making friends and being responsible, for example, becoming a prefect. A

system is in place to recognise the achievements of young people and this is fairly managed to reflect all levels of progress. Records evidence personal education plans and school reports. The agency has a system in place to capture and monitor education information, the responsibilities for foster carers are clearly detailed in agreements.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are supported to maintain significant relationships. Records evidence the arrangements in place for contact, children and young people clearly understood their arrangements and said they are happy with them. Expectations for supporting contact are clearly agreed with foster carers and any negotiations are supported by the agency. Opportunities are in place for young people to express their views and make improvements within the agency, for example, changes have been made to the children's handbook as a result of consultation. Young people report they are fully supported to put their views across at their reviews. Records show young people's views are sought as part of the carer review process, for example an issue with pocket money raised was resolved. The agency advocates on behalf of young people with other organisations, for example, to support preferred placement choice. A further example found that foster carers consult and include the views of young people in their reports for external agencies where appropriate. Young people are informed about their right to see their file.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

These standards have not been inspected.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose clearly sets out the overall aims and objectives of the service and this is consistent with what the service provides. The statement of purpose meets the standards and is regularly updated to include changes. Robust systems and processes are in place to manage and overview the day to day running of the service. Administration support is efficient and organised data systems enable auditing and monitoring. Arrangements for initial enquiries, visits and assessment allocation are in place. Foster carers' reviews are met within the yearly targets set and panels are organised frequently for approvals. Supervision is prioritised and workers highly value the support they receive. Systems are in place for workloads and these are manageable. Workers understood their decision-making responsibilities within the organisational structure. Allegations, complaints and safeguarding matters are quickly and effectively responded to and the outcomes recorded. Training opportunities are available including external courses and e-learning methods to update knowledge and skills and maintain professional social work registration. Policies and procedures are in place and records evidence these are followed and fully recorded. The manager and workers have extensive experience in working with children, families and foster carers therefore work effectively with all agencies supported by the agreements in place. There is an on going commitment to improving the service and the systems to evidence the positive outcomes for children and young people. Foster carers report full confidence in the agency and the support/training offered is relevant to their needs. The arrangements for the support and supervision for foster carers is structured

and fully recorded. Children and foster carers have separate files and secure arrangements are in place for storage including a retention and archive policy.

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):

- ensure that health services, appointments and health assessments are recorded in young people's files to fully evidence health needs are consistently met.
- ensure individual potential risks and strategies are included in safe care policies to evidence the measures in place
- ensure panel minutes include the reasons for the recommendation for prospective foster carers suitability to foster. The reasons relate to the skills/competencies/abilities demonstrated during the assessment process and any potential weaknesses are fully considered.
- ensure any gaps in employment history are fully explained and recorded on each occasion.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent 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.