

Nene Valley Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent 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

Nene Valley Fostering Agency is a member of Pathway Care (Eastern Region) which is part of the Pathway Care Group of Companies that have their headquarters in Cardiff. The Regional Director is currently acting as manager of the service and a new Team Manager has been appointed to take up post in July. In addition to two financial and administrative staff there are five supervising social workers and an education advisor. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 33 fostering households providing 48 placements.

Summary

The fostering agency has been subject to change of ownership since the last inspection. The new company has endeavoured to keep carers and staff informed about the change process. New social work staff have been recruited and with the good administrative support that is in place, represent a strong team. Good training and development opportunities are available to carers and staff and the agency is ready to implement the Children's Workforce Development Council standards. Due to the changes and reorganisation of agency records some important documents were not accessible or evidenced on carer and children's files. Very good recording tools are about to be introduced to account for placement planning and placement outcomes. Good systems are in place to monitor the activity and performance of the service through a dedicated quality assurance department.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations or requirements were made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Carer records show that the health and development of children in placement is routinely considered at supervision sessions. Children are receiving good health care and routine health and medical checks are being carried out. Looked After Children (LAC) reviews confirm that statutory health care assessments are taking place. Copies of health action plans were on some children's files. Some carers confirmed that they receive copies of health action plans and were aware of their responsibility to support these. Carers maintain separate logs for medical appointments and administration of medication. These can move with the child in placement. Agreement to medical consent was seen in some but not all children's files looked at. New placement planning systems being implemented in April includes written confirmation that medical consent has been obtained. Carers are provided with first aid training and have access to good health information in the carer's handbook.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a strong recruitment policy and all appropriate documents and checks were in place on the personnel files looked at. The Regional Director is the Acting Registered Manager for the service and the Registered Manager application is currently being processed. A permanent

Operational Team Manager will be in post and working on site in July. Safe care and child protection training is provided to carers both pre-approval and post-approval. Child protection procedures have been reviewed and good safeguarding guidance is in the carer handbook. Other related training opportunities include 'introduction to attachment' and 'safe handling and de-escalation skills'. Carers demonstrated a good understanding of the needs of the children they were looking after and of the impact of the children's experiences on behaviours. Children were well matched to carers in cases looked at. The agency is in the process of removing some documentation from files in readiness to introduce new recording systems. This has led to some gaps in carer and children's records and an apparent lack of clarity about which documents should be retained. Safe care plans, health and safety checks and placement agreements were inconsistently represented in files and not always in evidence. Where a carer had moved to a new property a health and safety check had not been carried out. However good placement risk assessments were completed in some instances and in most records there was written evidence of placement matching considerations. Some unannounced visits were overdue but these have been undertaken recently. Very good systems are about to be implemented by the agency to monitor the quality of placements and placement outcomes for children. A 'placement pack' provided to supervising social workers contains a range of planning, supervision, safeguarding and risk management tools. At the time of a child leaving a placement an 'end of placement review' will be carried out. The quality and assurance department also has an active role in monitoring the overall activity of the agency and for ensuring that required operational policies and procedures are in place. There has been a change in the fostering panel arrangements and Nene Fostering will be sharing a panel with another Pathway Care fostering service within the region. The new panel is appropriately constituted. Very good protocols and recording systems are in place for the new panel. Training has been provided to panel members regarding their role and responsibility and panel processes.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Carers receive diversity training and recognise the value of this. Children with cultural and ethnic needs whose records were looked at, were very well matched to appropriate placements. There is a good representative staff team to support different placement needs. A dedicated member of staff monitors school placements and provides support and advice to carers. Where necessary she will attend school meetings with carers. She has implemented good monitoring systems to track and review educational progress but is concerned about the difficulty in obtaining Personal Education Plans (PEPs) from local authorities. Up to 50% of children placed do not have a PEP. The agency can evidence that the PEPs have been requested in writing and that they continue to pursue placing social workers. Children have a right to a Personal Education Plan and the lack of an agreed focussed plan can impact on their educational achievement. Very good work is being undertaken by carers to promote children's education in their placements. Carers are ensuring that books, art materials and games are accessible in the home and confirmed that they encourage children to read and write and to have fun doing so. Individual hobbies and activities are encouraged and some young people said in surveys that they liked swimming, bowling and going to cubs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Children's contact with their families is being appropriately clarified and supported in cases looked at. Carers have a good understanding of the need to support contact and of the impact that contact can sometimes have on children's behaviour. Children are routinely consulted at the time of their LAC reviews and carer annual reviews. They are supported by their foster carers and supervising social workers to contribute to LAC reviews, whether attending or completing consultation forms. Carers recognise the need to listen to children and to include them in choices and decisions where appropriate. There is a good clear complaints procedure leaflet designed for children, in addition to the children's guide, that includes contact information for representing a complaint or concern. Children are being encouraged to contribute to the Pathway Care newsletter 'The Eastern Eagle' by contributing, for example poems and stories. Their achievements will also be recognised in the newsletter.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A very good Statement of Purpose and children's guide includes appropriate information. The children's guide is colourful and includes photographs of the Nene Valley team. There are 'all about me' sections for children to complete and sections to record personal experiences. The last 12 months have been a transitional period during which the Nene Valley Fostering Agency has been integrated into the Pathway organisation. The transition has been managed sensitively with minimum disruption to carers and staff. New computer systems including a new database have been installed. Strong systems are in place to manage and monitor the service and there is an increased focus on monitoring placement objectives and outcomes. Significant incidents and events are properly recorded and reported and policies and procedures have been brought up to date. Additional administrative and social work staff have been recruited to create a strong staff team. Social work staff are well qualified with good child-care and child protection experience. Workloads are appropriate and involve carer supervision and foster carer assessments. Staff have been provided with good training and induction programmes and receive good levels of supervision. Recent training has included confirmation about the role and responsibility of the supervisory social worker. Carers are well supported by their supervising social workers and say that they have no problems getting help and advice when they need it. Most have demonstrated a positive attitude to the changes in management and are waiting to see the impact of this. They have been well informed about the handover process over the last year. Carers met were competent and enthusiastic and committed to providing good placements. They value seeing and supporting each other and a new formal support group is being set up. There is a dedicated Pathway Training and Development Manager who coordinates staff and carer training across the region. This includes setting up in-house training as well as the buying in of external trainers. A good annual training programme has been drawn up and provided to carers and there is a clear stated expectation that carers will attend for training. Significantly the agency, staff and carers are well prepared and ready to implement the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards in April. Generally the standard of record keeping is satisfactory. Supervisions, annual reviews and fostering assessments are of a good standard and contain an evaluative element. The new recording systems being introduced in April are very good and will more thoroughly cover key placement requirements and include reporting under the five outcomes. Files are properly stored and secured. Two out of three foster care agreements in carer files looked at were not available during the inspection and although there

was confirmation that they had been completed they could not be located. By the end of the inspection new agreements had been signed by the carers and were placed on their file.

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 children and carer files are audited to confirm that key documents, including safe care policies, health and safety checklists, placement agreements and foster carer agreements are in place. (NMS 25.3)

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.