

East Lothian Council - Fostering Service Fostering Service

Family Placement Team
Randall House, Macmerry Business Park
Macmerry
Tranent
EH33 1RW

Telephone: 01620 827613

Type of inspection: Announced (short notice)
Inspection completed on: 26 January 2017

Service provided by:
East Lothian Council

Service provider number:
SP2003002600

Care service number:
CS2004083326

About the service

This service has been registered since 2005.

East Lothian Council provides a fostering service through their Family Placement Service for children and young people aged from 0-18 years and their families, who are assessed as in need of this service and who either live in, or have a connection with, East Lothian Council. The agency recruits and supports carer families to provide a range of fostering services, including full-time foster care, support care and 'share the care' which provides respite services for children with disabilities.

What people told us

We met six children and spoke with twenty one carers during this inspection. We also had access to the feedback gathered by the service themselves and in particular feedback from the annual review of carers. The overwhelming feedback from foster carers was very positive:

"being a foster care is the hardest and most rewarding thing you can do and I can't fault the support from East Lothian (council)" Foster Carer

Self assessment

The self assessment was fully completed and there was clear evidence of the involvement of all staff and consideration of the views of those using the service. The self-assessment was specific about areas for improvement in relation to service user involvement and we would encourage the service to ensure that these ideas are prioritised and taken forward.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	5 - Very Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	5 - Very Good

What the service does well

The overwhelming evidence from this inspection is that children and young people are benefitting from warm nurturing care from well supported, committed and knowledgeable foster carers. As a result young people are having their needs met and are achieving good outcomes. Specific examples included improvements in: engagement at school; relationships with family; relationships with peers; emotional development; social engagement. We would also highlight the enduring relationships foster carers have established with young people who no longer stay with them but which continue to provide support.

In the cases that we looked at we found that planning for children is very good and this has ensured that the number of placements experienced by young people is reduced. This is underpinned by robust reviewing arrangements and we also noted that the level of contact between allocated social workers and children was very good. Planning for children is also supported by the efforts made to involve birth families and we were impressed by the role played by foster carers in the cases we looked at.

The good outcomes we identified for children and young people are also achieved within the context of a high level of support provided to foster carers. All carers we spoke with reported very positively about their current experience of support from this service. We found that the service had been proactive in making improvements to support including the review of support groups and the range of training opportunities provided. In relation to the latter, specific training on 'self-regulation' was received very positively and a number of carers we spoke with reflected on the impact this training had on them and the way they responded to behaviours. The foster carers were ambitious beyond mandatory training and the service was committed to further improvements in the planning of training to ensure more carers would be able to take part.

The staff group includes practitioners with specific areas of expertise and interest and we found that this service is very good at ensuring that leadership is shared across the team relative to these. All of the staff we spoke with were articulate about their own responsibilities and clear about leadership provided by others and there was a clear respect for what each other brought to the team. New members of the team were well supported during the induction period. The team are committed to improvement and this is modelled by managers who have a clear vision for the service which is congruent with the vision of the larger organisation. The co-location of social work services was seen by all as a real strength and we would concur that this appeared to have supported respectful relationships with other social work staff which were in the best interests of children.

What the service could do better

There has been some turnover of staff within the service and this has been a unsettled time for this service. While carers overwhelmingly reported little impact on them or the children and young people they look after we found some evidence of impact on the work of the service. For example, we found in the files that we looked at that unannounced visits had been inconsistent.

We also found that efforts to develop improvement plans for the service had not been sustained. In relation to this we were satisfied that the commitment to improvement was evident in the discussion with staff and the various meetings staff are involved in. However we were concerned that plans for improvement were not recorded in any way that progress or impact of changes could be evidently monitored or measured. Considering the turnover of staff experienced by the team recently we were concerned that progress or ideas themselves could be lost in the absence of key staff. We would suggest that the service considers whether the development of a 'SMART' improvement plan (incorporating findings from this inspection and areas for development identified in the self assessment) would help ensure progress is monitored and improvements are sustained.

From discussion with foster carers we also identified two areas where consultation and clear guidance would be helpful:

- the role of emergency social work service
- the transition of children and young people to permanent placements (especially the role of foster carers)

Finally, the service should ensure that it notifies the care inspectorate in line with current guidance. We heard from the service that changes to incident reporting would help to support this and we will review this at the next inspection.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 0

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
12 Mar 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
3 Oct 2013	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	5 - Very good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
4 Oct 2012	Announced (short notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 4 - Good
7 Dec 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good Not assessed
5 Aug 2008	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 5 - Very good 5 - Very good

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