

National Fostering Agency (Scotland) Limited Fostering Service

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Type of inspection:

Announced (short notice)

Completed on:

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Service provided by:

The National Fostering Agency
(Scotland) Limited

Service provider number:

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Service no:

CS2005098696

About the service

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Information about all care services is available on our website at www.careinspectorate.com.

National Fostering Agency (Scotland) Limited is an independent company owned by the National Fostering Agency Group. The service was previously registered with the Care Commission and has been registered with the Care Inspectorate since 2011.

National Fostering Agency (Scotland) Ltd provides a family placement service for children and young people from 0-18 years who are assessed as being in need of alternative family care. The agency recruits and supports carers to provide a range of fostering placements to children and young people and works with most local authorities across Scotland.

The service's Statement of Purpose cites that it's vision is to 'build incredible futures by empowering vulnerable young people in the UK to be happy and make their way in the world'.

What people told us

During this inspection, we met with a number of carers, children and young people. We also received questionnaire feedback from carers and local authority social workers. Whilst the majority of the feedback we received regarding the service was positive, possible areas for improvement were highlighted and these were considered during the course of the inspection.

Children and young people we met with were seen to be happy and well supported in their caring families. Most carers expressed that they were happy with the service and many advised that they would, or already had, recommended them to others who were considering the fostering role.

Self assessment

The service was not required to provide a self-assessment for this inspection.

From this inspection we graded this service as:

Quality of care and support	4 - Good
Quality of staffing	not assessed
Quality of management and leadership	3 - Adequate

Quality of care and support

Findings from the inspection

Most of the young people we considered during our inspection were found to be thriving in settled, stable, nurturing placements where they were being supported in terms of their safety, health and wellbeing. Those who were in long term placements experienced a sense of permanence and belonging within the family. The

commitment of carers to them, and to supporting them to achieve positive outcomes, was evident and carers had a good understanding of the needs of the children living with them.

In line with this, most carers were noted to be committed to positively and safely supporting relationships with birth family members, allowing children and young people to maintain positive connections and support their sense of identity.

Children's health and wellbeing needs were being well met and were supported by carers being proactive and responsive. The service had also introduced additional mechanisms to support emotional wellbeing in the form of children and young people's workers. Feedback from carers around these newly established roles was very positive and it was clear that they offered a valued support. On considering examples of their input, we found it resulted in a positive impact on young people's emotional wellbeing and subsequently placement stability. We are also aware of a very new development in the form of clinical psychologist consultation sessions which can be accessed by carers and young people to provide additional specialist support. We look forward to seeing how this has developed at the time of the next inspection.

We identified that children and young people were seen to be supported to enjoy activities and pursuits of their choice which, in turn, was seen to promote their self-confidence, self-esteem and social opportunities. Opportunities for young people and carers to engage in a range of activities were also made available through the service. These events were seen to offer the opportunity for individuals or families to come together, build relationships, share experiences and also promote meaningful engagement and participation with the organisation. We noted that many carers felt that they had an influence within the service, feeling listened to and having seen developments implemented as a result. Effective use of the carer engagement officer and carer forum acted to reinforce this sense of membership and influence within the service.

The education needs of children and young people were supported by carers who were noted to advocate on their behalf and to establish positive working relationships with education professionals. As a result, young people were seen to have access to additional supports, where required, and to be achieving and having positive experiences within their education placements.

We also noted examples of some positive working relationships between carers and placing authorities which supported young people's plans being progressed. Similarly, there was evidence of good working relationships existing between supervising social workers and local authorities where effective communication was key. This was also highlighted in feedback we received from some local authority social workers.

While we noted local issues, carer relationships with their supervising social worker and the support they received from them was positive in the majority of cases. Carers were seen to continue to receive a good level of support from the service and many commented on the availability and responsiveness of their supervising social worker, particularly in times of need or crisis.

The service has a system of mandatory training and additional training available to carers and panel members which includes access to e-modules. Training was positively commented on the majority of carers we considered.

Carers experienced regular review through the system of independent reviewing officers and the fostering panel. The composition of the panel was robust, incorporating members with a range of relevant experience and qualifications which supports them to carry out their roles and functions and we were pleased to note the recent appointment of a care experienced panel member.

We noted that child protection and adult protection policies and procedures were in place and were satisfied that safer recruitment practice was being undertaken within the organisation.

We identified the following areas for improvement:

We found some examples where young people had experienced poorer outcomes as a result of their care experience and also noted some instances where the lack of robust risk assessment was evident, which increased risk and had the potential to lead to poorer outcomes.

We found at this inspection that areas for improvement identified at the last inspection had not been sufficiently addressed relating to risk assessment and risk management planning (**see recommendation 1**) and physical restraint (**see Quality of management and leadership**).

There has been a significant increase in the number of placement disruptions in 2019 compared to the previous year and these will have a negative impact on children and young people's experiences and outcomes. We saw evidence that the service are attempting to explore this issue in greater detail and we urged them to further enhance their analysis of events to further inform learning and practice development. We also encouraged the service to ensure robust assessment and matching processes are consistently utilised to reduce unnecessary moves for children and young people taking place.

There have been a number of staff changes and further staffing changes are imminent within the service. While carers acknowledged that these changes are often unavoidable, many commented that they had experienced a number of changes in supervising social worker since the time of their initial approval and described the challenges that this brought. In some instances, this was linked to a reduction in the level of appropriate support being received by carers, including in relation to frequency of placement meetings and worker attendance at LAAC reviews and children's hearings. This was also an aspect commented on in feedback received from local authority social workers. We would encourage the organisation to consider the positive impact of support to carers in these forums in terms of building of confidence and opportunities to observe practice and inform practice development.

While the majority of carers spoke positively about training opportunities within the organisation, we noted that some carers had not completed mandatory training within organisational timeframes, including child protection. We were assured that this matter will be addressed as a priority.

We identified a number of important strengths in respect of the quality of care and support provided by the service which, taken together, outweigh areas for improvement. These strengths will have a significant positive impact on people's experiences and outcomes. However, improvements are required to maximise wellbeing and, importantly, ensure that people consistently have experiences and outcomes which are as positive as possible.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 1

1. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all individual children and young people, the service should record and assess identified risks.

This is to ensure the quality of care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards which state "I am protected from harm because people are alert and respond to signs of significant deterioration in my health and wellbeing, that I may be unhappy or at risk of harm" (HSCS 3.21) and "I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources" (HSCS 4.27).

Grade: 4 - good

Quality of staffing

This quality theme was not assessed.

Quality of management and leadership

Findings from the inspection

We heard from both carers and staff that managers were listening to their views and that they had used these to make some improvements. We also heard consistently from staff and carers that the registered manager was approachable and available.

We were confident that managers had a clear vision for the service. This vision supports the sense of purpose we viewed within the staff group and was also reflected in the sense of belonging we heard from a number of carers. This will contribute to stability within the service and more importantly for stable placements for children and young people.

The evidence we considered reflected well on the ability of management to provide leadership throughout changes to the service. Most carers and staff reflected that there had been very little impact from the increase in service size.

The systematic review of carers is well established, and the service was ensuring that all carers had an annual review. This was supported by the ongoing role of independent review officers. We found some evidence of appropriate challenge from independent review officers and this was further supported by similar oversight and challenge from the agency decision maker. Systematic appraisal of panel members appears to be embedded and we would urge the service to consider how it can apply this level of rigour in other areas identified during this inspection.

We identified the following areas for improvement:

We found that management overview of systems and processes was not always effectively preventing practice which fell short of statutory and organisational expectations. Examples of this included:

- The service is expected to notify the Care Inspectorate of certain events and incidents, including the use of physical restraint and allegations of abuse. This should be done within stated guidelines. We raised this at the last inspection but we found evidence that this had not been done on a number of occasions **(see requirement 1)**.
- We found concerning evidence that the service may have fallen short of expectations around data protection. Carers should expect that their information was safe and their privacy respected. They should also expect that they are properly informed when their information is shared, that this is done purposefully and the information is accurate **(see requirement 2)**.
- We were encouraged to see the development of a consistent and systematic approach to learning from unplanned endings. However, we found evidence that the 'unplanned ending meetings' were not taking place following all unplanned endings and occasions where these had not been undertaken prior to placing more children **(see recommendation 1)**.

In relation to physical restraint, we felt that, in addition to carers and staff being clear about recording and reporting these incidents, other aspects of policy and practice required further attention and communication. The 'last resort' principle should be emphasised to all carers to ensure that practice matches this organisational ethos. Assessing the use of physical restraint with specific young people, relevant to their needs and fully considering the potential impact of using this approach should be evidenced as a separate risk assessment **(see recommendation 2)**.

In the case file reading, we came across a number of recording issues which we shared with the service during the feedback. The recording systems were not as intuitive as expected, meaning that the information was difficult to locate. Some formal records included informal, casual comments which did not reflect well and appeared at times inappropriate. As a result of these findings, we were not confident that auditing of records was identifying and addressing these issues. We heard of proposed changes to the IT systems used and will look at the impact of these at the next inspection.

The articulated ethos of continuing care is clear and there is evidence of this being experienced by young people and carers. However, there is still some confusion among carers and some staff about continuing care in practice. We found that the development of the new service had introduced processes which were not congruent with the ethos of 'staying put'. The contractual formal approach we saw evidence of was causing some consternation, including a comment from one carer that she was changing from being 'mum' to being a 'supporter'. We would urge the service to review implementation of continuing care in consultation with carers and young people, ensuring they are specifically involved in the review of documentation used for approval and review of carers.

During the inspection, we considered the panel and, in particular, practice around variations and de-registrations of carers. We found examples where there had been concerns about retrospective variations; on two occasions children had been placed shortly after an unplanned ending, outwith approval and prior to any unplanned ending meeting. We had some concern also about the approach around carer resignation or de-registration and, in particular, the robustness of processes in line with guidance **(see recommendation 3)**.

Following mixed views on the functioning of panels, we asked the service to consult with those who have an interest in attendance of carers at panel (including options for holding panels in other areas), agenda of panels (whether these are manageable and enough time is given to all items) and the role of the fostering agency (in particular, responsibility in quality assuring work of the service and more specifically ensuring that significant relevant information is always given to the panel).

In relation to management and leadership, whilst we could see strengths slightly outweigh areas for improvement, these are significant, and there are repeating issues.

Requirements

Number of requirements: 2

1. The service must notify the Care Inspectorate as detailed in the document: 'Records that all registered care services (except childminding) must keep and guidance on notification reporting'.

This requirement is made to ensure that the service meets the expectation of Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that "I benefit from different organisations working together and sharing information about me promptly where appropriate, and I understand how my privacy and confidentiality are respected" (HSCS 4.18) and "I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed" (HSCS 4.23).

This is also necessary in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - Welfare of Users.

Timescale: This should be implemented immediately upon receipt of this report.

2. The service must ensure that it respects the confidentiality and privacy of people who use their service. They must ensure that they securely store the required information they keep about carers and only share this where this is purposeful, always acting with transparency. The service should also ensure it fulfils its duty of candour responsibility where it does fall below this standard. Lastly, we would advise the service to seek further guidance on these matters to ensure they fulfil their responsibilities with regards to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

This requirement is made to ensure that the service meets the expectation of Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS), which state that "I benefit from different organisations working together and sharing information about me promptly where appropriate, and I understand how my privacy and confidentiality are respected" (4.18), "I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed" (HSCS 4.23), and "I receive an apology if things go wrong with my care and support or my human rights are not respected, and the organisation takes responsibility for its actions" (HSCS 4.4).

This is also necessary in order to comply with The Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011 - Regulation 4(1)(a) - Welfare of Users.

Timescale: All aspects of this requirement should be met by 30 December 2019.

Recommendations

Number of recommendations: 3

1. To ensure that children and young people are able to achieve the best outcomes, the service must ensure that it has processes in place which properly inform matching and identify any learning and development needs of carers. In this respect, the service should ensure that unplanned endings processes are properly implemented and consistently applied; this will require an improved robustness in assuring compliance and quality.

This is to ensure the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state "I use a service and organisation that are well led and managed" (HSCS 4.23).

2. To ensure that children and young people receive the care and support they need to be safe, the service should ensure that, where physical restraint is used, it reflects best practice based on a robust assessment of the

needs of the child or young person and each event is reviewed and learned from. The service should clearly communicate its philosophy and expectations to carers and staff.

This is to ensure the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state "I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice" (HSCS 4.11).

3. To ensure that children and young people receive high quality care and support the service must ensure that approval and termination of carers is in line with best practice and national guidance.

This is to ensure the quality of management and leadership is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which state "I experience high quality care and support based on relevant evidence, guidance and best practice" (HSCS 4.11).

Grade: 3 - adequate

What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

Previous requirements

There are no outstanding requirements.

What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at or since the last inspection

Previous recommendations

There are no outstanding recommendations.

Complaints

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

Enforcement

No enforcement action has been taken against this care service since the last inspection.

Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings
6 Nov 2017	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing Not assessed Management and leadership 5 - Very good
27 Nov 2015	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 5 - Very good
9 Jun 2015	Re-grade	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 4 - Good
8 Oct 2014	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 3 - Adequate Environment Not assessed Staffing 4 - Good Management and leadership 3 - Adequate
3 Dec 2013	Announced	Care and support 4 - Good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership 4 - Good
18 Oct 2011	Announced (short notice)	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed Staffing 5 - Very good Management and leadership Not assessed
17 Dec 2010	Announced	Care and support 5 - Very good Environment Not assessed

Date	Type	Gradings	
		Staffing Management and leadership	Not assessed 5 - Very good
22 Feb 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good Not assessed
2 Mar 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and leadership	4 - Good Not assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good

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