

## Cabinet

18 April 2012

### Children and Young People's Services: Ofsted inspection of local authority Fostering Service



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## Report of Corporate Management Team

David Williams, Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services

Councillor Claire Vasey, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services

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### Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides Cabinet with the outcomes of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection of Durham County Council Fostering Service.

### Background

2. Durham County Council Fostering Service aims to provide safe and secure care for children and young people to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes in life. The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide, develop and deliver a comprehensive and high quality, integrated service to meet the life long and diverse needs of children and their families/carers.
3. All local authority fostering services must have at least one inspection in each three-year inspection cycle. All inspection judgements are made using the following four point scale:

Outstanding	This aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good	This aspect of the provision is strong
Adequate	This aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate	This aspect of the provision is not good enough
4. The inspection of Durham's Fostering Service took place on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2012 and the final report has been published on the Ofsted website ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

### Ofsted Judgement and Gradings

5. The overall quality rating given by Ofsted to the local authority fostering service was **Outstanding**. The table below contains a summary of the main findings of Ofsted's inspection.

<b>Durham County Council Fostering Service</b>	
<b>Overall</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Helping children to be healthy	Outstanding
Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe	Outstanding
Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do	Outstanding
Helping children make a positive contribution	Outstanding
Achieving economic wellbeing	Outstanding
Organisation	Outstanding

### **Comparison with Statistical Neighbour Authorities**

6. The table below contains the inspection results of Durham's Statistical Neighbours, only two of which have achieved a rating of Outstanding.

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Inspection Date</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
Barnsley	6 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2010	Good
Darlington	31 <sup>st</sup> Jan 2008	Good
Doncaster	24 <sup>th</sup> May 2010	Satisfactory
Gateshead	17 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2011	Good
North Tyneside	17 <sup>th</sup> Oct 2007	Outstanding
St. Helens	2 <sup>nd</sup> Jun 2011	Good
Stockton-on-Tees	15 <sup>th</sup> May 2008	Good
Sunderland	22 <sup>nd</sup> Sep 2010	Good
Wakefield	4 <sup>th</sup> Jul 2011	Good
Wigan	16 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2011	Outstanding

### **Summary**

7. The overview of the inspector's findings included the following strengths of the Fostering Service:
- Provides young people with outstanding outcomes, and ensures that young people's experience of care is positive and improves their life chances
  - Young people's individual health care needs are met well and appropriate provision for specialist support is available
  - Strong measures in place to protect young people from harm
  - School attendance is excellent and attainment continues to improve
  - Strong commitment at all levels...to listen to young people and help them shape the way the fostering service operates
  - Young people are well supported to make the transition to adulthood
  - Well managed and is monitored closely to ensure that it continues to work in the best interests of young people
  - Panel makes a significant contribution to the safety and well-being of young people
  - High level of placement stability is being achieved
  - Readily identifies and actions areas for improvement

8. There were no recommendations made by the inspector for improvements, but Cabinet Members should be reassured that the service does have a development plan and will continue to develop the service and further strengthen delivery to improve outcomes for young people.

### **Recommendations**

9. Cabinet is asked to note the report.

### **Background papers**

10. Durham's inspection report is included as Appendix 2.

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**Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** - N/A – Report for information only

**Staffing** - N/A – Report for information only

**Risk** - N/A – Report for information only

**Equality and Diversity** - N/A – Report for information only

**Accommodation** - N/A – Report for information only

**Crime and Disorder** - N/A – Report for information only

**Human Rights** - N/A – Report for information only

**Consultation** - N/A – Report for information only

**Procurement** - N/A – Report for information only

**Disability Discrimination Act** - N/A – Report for information only

**Legal Implications** – N/A – Report for information only



# Durham County Council Fostering Service

Inspection report for local authority fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC043795
<b>Inspection date</b>	02/03/2012
<b>Inspector</b>	David Martin / Lynne Busby
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	07/01/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

### 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**

Durham County Council fostering service provides a range of fostering services to children who are looked after by the local authority. The fostering service aims to promote stability and safety for children and young people in the care system.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This local authority fostering service provides young people with outstanding outcomes, and ensures that young people's experience of care is positive and improves their life chances. Young people's individual health care needs are met well and appropriate provision for specialist support is available. There are strong measures in place to protect young people from harm. School attendance is excellent and attainment continues to improve. There is a strong commitment at all levels within the organisation to listen to young people and help them shape the way the fostering service operates. Young people are well supported to make the transition to adulthood. The service is well managed and is monitored closely to ensure that it continues to work in the best interests of young people. Panel makes a significant contribution to the safety and well-being of young people. A high level of placement stability is being achieved and matches are only made after careful consideration. It is a real strength of the organisation that it readily identifies and actions areas for improvement.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

There were no recommendations made at the last inspection.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

This fostering service is committed to ensuring that young people's physical, emotional and psychological health care needs are met. Foster carers clearly understand their responsibilities to promote good health and healthy lifestyles. One commented that, as carers, 'we see to the child's health and lifestyle by providing good healthy diets, medical care, and exercise'. The healthcare needs of young people are monitored effectively through monthly supervision. This ensures that young people's health continues to be a priority.



There is open access to the in-house therapeutic service which provides highly valued, individualised input through direct work with children and young people and advice, guidance and support to carers. The service also offers specialist training, for example, in attachment theory, which carers rate very highly as helping them to understand young people's behaviour. The service is able to respond quickly to referrals and this has had a significant impact on placement stability.

The Looked After Children's nursing team is well established and offers a full range of services to promote good health. Its staff are highly motivated to support young people and carers. In addition to its routine monitoring of young people's health care needs, it offers specialist advice on drug and alcohol misuse, sexual health and smoking cessation. The team is making a strong contribution to the health and well-being of young people.

Foster carers who provide placements for children and young people with complex health care needs are well supported. They have access to specialist training, often prior to a placement being made. This approach ensures that the individual health care needs of all young people are met.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Throughout the inspection young people consistently said that they feel safe in their placements. They are fully aware of their individual safer care plans and have an excellent understanding of the ways in which they can protect themselves from harm. Both young people and carers are keenly aware of the steps that they can take to ensure safe use of the internet. This makes a significant contribution to the overall safety and well-being of young people.

Carers have a sound understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard and protect children and young people. They are confident about taking action to report any concerns and to manage the disclosures of sensitive information. They have undertaken appropriate training and the ongoing safety of young people features strongly in their supervision. Foster carers are well prepared to keep young people safe.

The fostering service, and the authority as a whole, is strongly committed to fulfilling its responsibilities to protect children and young people. The key principles of safeguarding are promoted well throughout its documentation and the fostering social workers have a clear understanding that safeguarding young people is the priority in their decision making. This protects young people in placement and foster carers' birth children.

The occurrence of young people going missing is relatively low in view of the number of young people in placement. When they do go missing, young people are absent for short periods only. Appropriate action is taken to locate them and ensure that they return safely.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Young people enjoy very positive relationships with their carers. There are some exceptional carers, and their professional colleagues hold them all in high regard. One typically commented that they are, 'hugely impressed by the carers, their commitment, understanding and willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children in their care'. Carers who contributed to the inspection were very positive about the need to create warm, nurturing placements to enable young people to thrive.

On the whole, young people are effectively engaged with their carers and their families. One young person said that, 'we have an amazing family now'. Young people feel valued, enjoy respectful care and attention and have a positive outlook. For example, one young person commented that, 'my carers talk about what I want to do when I'm older – I would like to be a chef – when I have an opinion my carers listen to me and I listen back'. Young people also talked about learning how to

modify their behaviour and knowing what is and is not acceptable. Three young people in one placement proudly showed off their weekly activity charts and clearly understood that positive behaviour brings rewards and success.

The fostering service actively promotes the value of education and works in partnership with the looked after children's education service to enable all young people to access education. School attendance levels are high and the looked after children's education service responds quickly and effectively in cases where young people are under threat of being excluded. Attainment is good, this is particularly noticeable for year 11 students, and has seen continual improvement in recent years. Young people benefit from the fostering service's commitment to promoting education.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The participation of young people in decision making about their own personal circumstances and shaping the way in which services are delivered is well established. Young people are strongly encouraged to share their wishes, feelings and aspirations through review processes and can, if they want to, chair their own review meetings. They have good relationships with their independent reviewing officers. Young people clearly expressed an understanding of the reasons why they are looked after and what the future holds for them. This provides them with stability and a sense of security.

There is a strong commitment throughout the organisation to hear young people's views. This includes the most senior managers and council members, who take an active interest in the fostering service and how well young people think it is performing. There is a longstanding children in care council that has made a positive contribution to the development of services. Its members are involved in the delivery of training for new social workers and foster carers, and interviewing prospective members of staff. The children in care council is supported by a dedicated children's rights worker, is clear about the way it wishes to communicate its views to adults and, occasionally, is forthright and direct in its opinions.

Contact with birth families and significant adults is strongly promoted. Foster carers understand their role in facilitating contact where appropriate. Contact always takes place in accordance with court directions and placement plans.

As noted above, young people enjoy warm and positive relationships with their carers and their families and have the time and space to begin to make sense of the events that have occurred in their lives. This is acknowledged by birth parents and one said, they are 'over the moon' with the care the children receive and 'the children are loved to bits and the care is brilliant'. Where possible, placements are planned but all emergency placements are reviewed promptly and thoroughly within a short timescale. This approach ensures that young people's individual needs are clearly identified and where necessary appropriate resources are allocated to ensure

placement stability.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service has well-developed partnerships with external agencies and leaving care services to ensure that young people are able to make a positive transition to adulthood. One young person who has recently left foster care explained that they have been well supported to live independently. They have a very positive attitude to work, college and friendships. The fostering service works closely with the Looked After Children Education Services who have established links with a local university to provide the mentoring scheme for young people, including those who are post-statutory school age. This has been very successful in supporting young people and giving them positive role models both socially and academically. Foster carers have an excellent understanding of their role and responsibilities in helping children and young people undertake tasks for daily living develop their skills for independence. The arrangements in place provide young people with solid foundations on which to build their futures.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Both fostering panels are working extremely hard in keeping up with the work demanded of them. Panel minutes provide a thorough account of the matters coming before them. Panels are conducted in a respectful way and are sensitive to the issues concerning carers. They offer rigorous analysis of assessments and review reports and clearly identify issues on which clarification is required. Both panels are fulfilling their responsibility to provide feedback and quality assurance. The decision-making processes are clearly set out and the reasons for panel recommendations are clear and appropriate. The work of the service's fostering panels makes a significant contribution to the overall safety and well-being of young people.

To ensure the most effective use of resources a 'Placement Management' team was created in September 2010 to manage all referrals and initial placements and matches. This development is widely acclaimed as a success and is highly valued by fostering social workers and managers in the other fostering teams. The fostering service is keen to ensure placement stability and permanence. It has been very successful in finding long-term placements for many young people and has also quickly developed an effective relatives and friends service. Young people benefit from carefully considered matches.

The fostering service staff and foster carers have a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the service. They are set out clearly and concisely in the statement of purpose and foster carers' handbook.

The recruitment of foster carers is keeping up with demand and has enabled the

fostering service to become less reliant on external placements. Foster carers are thoroughly assessed and checked prior to approval. Staff who work for the service are also robustly vetted prior to being offered employment. These measures help to protect young people from harm and prevent them from coming into contact with adults who are not suitable to work with children. All staff and foster carers receive supervision at appropriate intervals and have excellent access to training. The management structure is well regarded by staff and managers are approachable and knowledgeable. A strong, supportive culture permeates the whole organisation. Young people benefit from having contact with adults who are well qualified and experienced.

The fostering service's records are well maintained and regularly audited. The performance of all staff is closely monitored to ensure that they are meeting their responsibilities to improve outcomes for young people. The local authority has committed funds and resources to ensure the growth and development of the fostering service. Carers' fees are paid in good time. Overall, the fostering service has an excellent track record in identifying areas where it is performing strongly and those that it needs to develop and improve.