



## Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

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# Inspection Report

Rhondda Cynon Taff Fostering Service  
Children`s Services  
Ty Pennant  
Catherine Street  
Pontypridd  
CF37 2TB

Type of Inspection – Focused  
Dates of inspection – Monday, 18 January 2016  
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## Summary

### About the service

Sheryn Edwards has been appointed by Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) County Borough Council to manage its fostering service. Its offices are in Pontypridd.

At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 329 children placed with approximately 226 fostering households approved by the service. This included;

- 135 children placed in kinship placements
- 160 children in mainstream placements
- 24 children attending short breaks with family link carers and
- 10 children attending respite – support care placements

The arrangements for inspecting the authority's arrangements for private fostering are separate to this inspection process.

### What type of inspection was carried out?

This routine, announced and focussed inspection was undertaken between 10am and 3pm on 18<sup>th</sup> January; between 10am and 5pm on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> January and 10am and 1pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The following methodology was employed;

- we viewed a sample of relevant documents and records and
- held discussions with foster carers, staff and managers of the kinship, mainstream and family link aspects of the service

### What does the service do well?

The carers, staff and managers we met with demonstrated a commitment to improving the service and insight into how that could be achieved.

The service has retained a core of experienced staff and foster carers and has been successful in enabling a high number of children to remain within their family networks, in kinship fostering placements.

There has been a good commitment to the 'When I'm Ready' scheme and 14 young people have remained with their carers after the age of 18 since its introduction in July 2013.

### What has improved since the last inspection?

These are some of the improvements since the last inspection;

- the majority of foster carers' reviews had been undertaken
- the support provided to most carers had improved; (support of kinship carers remained a challenge)
- matching of children with foster carers had improved
- consultation and engagement with children had improved including access to

website facilities

- there were plans for the fostering teams to develop their role further in planning for and monitoring children's progress
- all staffing vacancies had been filled and staff motivation was high

### **What needs to be done to improve the service?**

The following recommendations are made in respect of areas identified during the inspection, as in need of improvement;

- that information for children about their placements and their rights and entitlements is improved
- that the quality of care review process is further developed and reports of its findings are made readily available to appropriate stakeholders
- that information is included in the quality of care review report to demonstrate the sustainability of children's placements
- that care plans, personal education plans and foster placement agreements provide greater clarity about the objectives to be attained in regard to the children and plans for how they will be met
- that managers monitor any difficulties or delays for children accessing support services to establish if improvements can be made
- to continue to improve the opportunities for engaging with children to better understand their views about their care and any improvements they feel could be made
- that managers review the respective roles and responsibilities of case managing and fostering social workers to ensure that risk assessments are in place for all known and likely risks associated with caring for the children
- that information systems are revised to provide information that is specific to the children placed with carers approved by the service in regard to their school attendance and academic progress and attainment at school or college and in relation to their involvement in leisure activities
- that the parents of children attending family links, short break placements are formally consulted within the foster carers' review process

## Quality Of Life

Overall, we found that the systems in place to monitor and provide evidence based information and reports about the quality of life and the progress of the children needed further development.

The new managers had already identified that systems needed to be improved to gather evidence of the views and the experience of the children placed with their carers to assist them in evaluating the effectiveness of their placements. They acknowledged the need to collate such information in relation to each aspect of the service as the support needs of the children in mainstream, kinship, family links and support care placements were different. A website had been established in consultation with children for them to share their thoughts and raise any concerns with the local authority

A children's guide was available to provide information for children when placed with carers and in some instances, carers had compiled information booklets to give them information about their homes, their lifestyles and their families. Managers acknowledged the need to improve information for children and had plans to produce information for children of different ages and in respect of the different types of care they might receive in mainstream, kinship, family link or support care placements. They planned to produce this information on paper, on line and in DVD formats.

Fostering social workers said that the matching of children with foster carers had improved and that they held initial placement meetings where possible; to ensure they were suitably placed and that their support needs were made known. One of the fostering social workers was undertaking research to develop expertise in matching children with foster carers and improving placement sustainability.

Feedback from foster carers indicated that matching processes had improved but that the quality of children's care plans, personal education plans and foster placement agreements was varied. Not all of the children were subject to the 'looked after children' planning and review systems as some were placed as 'children in need of support'. There were 'about me' books that had been compiled by social workers in the family link service to provide information for carers about the needs and the likes and dislikes of the children. The small number of foster placement agreements we checked in relation to the family link service provided little clarity about the purpose of children's placements; some simply said, 'to be provided respite care'.

Managers acknowledged the need to ensure there were detailed plans in place for all of the children to provide clarity about their support needs and the plans for them to be provided for. They said there were plans for the fostering teams to develop their roles further in planning for and monitoring the children's progress and for better integration between the care planning and review processes for children and the review processes for their carers.

The statement of purpose made reference to a comprehensive range of support services for the children and feedback from carers and staff indicated that many of the children had received very good support to promote their positive development. They also said that there were sometimes delays and difficulties in accessing the support children needed to fulfil their potential. Carers and staff said there was an ongoing need to advocate for the children to ensure they accessed the support they needed.

A range of processes were in place to engage with the children and for them to share their views about their care. We saw evidence that their views had been sought to inform the review of their foster carers and a website had been developed for them to share their thoughts and feelings with the fostering service. The local authority held an annual achievements award ceremony and between 45 and 50 children had received awards to recognise their achievements. This event was seen to promote their confidence and was attended by their families, their carers and social workers and other people involved in their lives.

A number of processes were in place for assessing and managing the risks associated with caring for the children. These included multi agency risk assessments and risk assessments for children at school. When asked, managers were unable to provide a risk assessment for children going on holidays with their carers, despite this commonly taking place. It is necessary that risk assessments are in place for any known or likely risks associated with caring for the children.

Whilst there was some information gathered by the local authority in relation to the educational progress of the children, information to demonstrate their attendance, progress and academic attainment needed further development to reflect their educational outcomes and involvement in leisure activities.

The authority had piloted the 'When I'm Ready' scheme in July 2013 and 14 young people had since remained with their 'ex foster carers' after reaching the age of 18.

## Quality Of Staffing

The focus of this inspection was on the quality of life and the quality of the care of the children. The quality of the staffing of the service was not considered in detail.

At the last inspection, it was found that there was a core of established staff but staff vacancies had impacted on their ability to support the foster carers and to review the standard of care they provided.

At this inspection, it was confirmed that several new staff had been appointed and that all staff vacancies had been filled.

Feedback from the mainstream, kinship and family links foster carers about the staff supporting them was very positive in terms of their dedication, skills and experience.

There was some feedback to suggest that the adequacy of staffing had been strained and in particular, in the kinship team. Staff and managers said that the demands of meeting court timescales for assessments had impacted on their ability to ensure that kinship carers received the support, guidance and monitoring necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children. The managers said that staffing levels would be subject to review in this regard

Staff employed independently for recruiting and undertaking the assessments of foster carers (not kinship carers) attended team meetings alongside staff employed by the fostering service to improve communication between them.

## Quality Of Leadership and Management

The focus of this inspection was on the quality of life and the quality of the care of the children. The quality of the leadership and management of the service was not considered in detail.

At the last inspection, it was found that the management and leadership of the service had not been consistent and that changes to management structures and personnel had impeded its effectiveness. In particular, in supporting and reviewing the quality of the care provided by its foster carers and in appraising the performance its staff.

At this inspection, a new manager had been appointed to manage the fostering service and two new team managers. One with responsibility for the mainstream, family links and support care placements and one with responsibility for kinship placements. The aspect of the service responsible for short breaks for children with disabilities had previously been located separately to the mainstream and kinship aspects of the service but was being integrated at the time of the inspection.

Foster carers, staff and managers all demonstrated commitment to improving the fostering service and acknowledged the need to better understand the views and the experience of the children, to inform its ongoing improvement.

The statement of purpose dated January 2016 provided an overview of the operation and resourcing of the service and included the aims and objectives to be attained on behalf of the children. The quality of care review process, intended to monitor, review and improve the quality of care provided to children needed further development. It provided no evidence of the views of stakeholders; including children, their families and foster carers about the quality of care being provided.

The fostering panel was not considered at this inspection.

## Quality Of The Carers

We held separate discussions with a group of 15 foster carers approved to provide mainstream, family links and support care placements and 5 foster carers approved to provide kinship placements.

Their feedback indicated that the support available to them had been good and that mostly, they had received support from the same named fostering social worker for several years. Some said they had experienced a change of fostering social workers but that each of them had provided very good support. Whilst there were examples given of fostering social workers providing support to carers outside of office hours, the carers felt that the formal arrangements for them to access support from the authority's emergency duty team were not ideal. They indicated that they were sometimes unable to access the support, advice or guidance they needed from them.

In the main, feedback about foster carer training was very positive and in particular, in relation to a ten week programme of training some had attended in relation to attachment theory and the significance of relationships for the children they cared for. This training had been attended by 22 carers so far and managers said there were plans for more to attend in the future. One recently approved carer said they had been pleasantly surprised at the support and training they had received and that they were enjoying their new role as a foster carer. One fostering couple who specialised in providing placements for babies had been approved by the service for 40 years and conveyed a continuing enthusiasm for their role. Some said that their opportunities to attend training were good but the scope of the training was limited. Managers and staff felt that the range of training available to carers was very good but acknowledged that some longstanding carers did not enjoy attending refresher training that they had previously attended.

Twice annual support groups were held for carers in each of the three geographic areas of the Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council and managers said they planned to develop these further. Some carers said they had never felt so well supported by the fostering service.

Whilst the provision of support and training for kinship carers was critical to ensure the children placed with them received the support and guidance they needed, some of them lived hundreds of miles away which presented challenges for the service.

Managers and staff confirmed that the majority of foster carer reviews had been undertaken though a very small had been delayed for reasons beyond their control. They said that all carers had received at least one unannounced annual visit and that many had received more.

Records showed that the views of the parents of children attending short breaks in family links placements were not formally consulted as part of the foster carers' review process. We heard that joint working between parents and carers was otherwise well developed.



## How we inspect and report on services

We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focused inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focused inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.