

Care service inspection report

Full inspection

Midlothian Council Adoption Service Adoption Service

Lawfield Primary School
26 Lawfield Road
Mayfield
Dalkeith

Service provided by: Midlothian Council

Service provider number: SP2003002602

Care service number: CS2004083727

Inspection Visit Type: Announced (Short Notice)

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Contact Us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

www.careinspectorate.com

 [@careinspect](https://twitter.com/careinspect)

Summary

This report and grades represent our assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during this inspection.

Grades for this care service may change after this inspection following other regulatory activity. For example, if we have to take enforcement action to make the service improve, or if we investigate and agree with a complaint someone makes about the service.

We gave the service these grades

Quality of care and support	4	Good
Quality of staffing	4	Good
Quality of management and leadership	4	Good

What the service does well

- Adopters told us about the good quality of support they received from their Supervising Social Worker.
- Staff were experienced and skilled in their work and had good access to training.
- Staff worked effectively together to identify and assess children in need of permanent care.
- We thought the adoption agency gave appropriate attention to detail when linking and matching children. This meant that adopters were better able to meet children's needs.

What the service could do better

We assessed that the agency could do more to provide life history information for children and adoptive families in a more child friendly way.

The agency should adopt a more comprehensive approach to planning how the service will develop, and share this with people who use the service and stakeholders.

What the service has done since the last inspection

The service had significantly improved the way they tracked the planning for children in their area and this had reduced the amount of delay in decision making for children. We noted for some children there had been some delay in decision making.

Greater partnership working across teams has supported flexible working aimed at promoting positive outcomes for children in need of adoption.

Conclusion

We concluded that there was a continued commitment from Midlothian Council to improve adoption services for children in their area. Staff and adoptive families were committed to providing good quality care to children and young people.

1 About the service we inspected

The Care Inspectorate regulates care services in Scotland. Prior to 1 April 2011, this function was carried out by the Care Commission. Information in relation to all care services is available on our website at www.scswis.com.

This service was previously registered with the Care Commission and transferred its registration to the Care Inspectorate on 1 April 2011.

Midlothian Council Adoption Service provides an adoption service for children and young people aged 0-18 years, and their families, who are assessed as in need of this service. The functions of an adoption service are detailed in the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

These functions are to:

- assess children who may be adopted
- assess prospective adopters
- place children for adoption
- provide information about adoption and
- provide adoption support services.

Midlothian Council Adoption Service operates within a small geographical area. The local authority is part of an active consortium of neighbouring local authorities who share adoptive placements for children.

During the past year there have been a number of changes within the Agency. One new social worker and a social work assistant have been recruited to the family placement team. A new manager has also been appointed and has been of positive benefit in developing the service.

At the time of the most recent annual return (January 2015), the agency had three approved adopters, one of whom was awaiting a child being placed. A further five applications had been received from people wishing to adopt.

One child had been registered as in need of adoption and had been placed with an adoptive family within the year. A further six children had been approved for adoption and were waiting for a family to be identified.

The aims and objectives of the service are:

- "To provide for the recruitment, assessment, training and ongoing support of carers and adoptive parents to meet the identified needs of looked after children and adopters".

Recommendations

A recommendation is a statement that sets out actions that a care service provider should take to improve or develop the quality of the service, but where failure to do so would not directly result in enforcement.

Recommendations are based on the National Care Standards, SSSC codes of practice and recognised good practice. These must also be outcomes-based and if the provider meets the recommendation this would improve outcomes for people receiving the service.

Requirements

A requirement is a statement which sets out what a care service must do to improve outcomes for people who use services and must be linked to a breach in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 (the "Act"), its regulations, or orders made under the Act, or a condition of registration. Requirements are enforceable in law.

We make requirements where (a) there is evidence of poor outcomes for people using the service or (b) there is the potential for poor outcomes which would affect people's health, safety or welfare.

Based on the findings of this inspection this service has been awarded the following grades:

Quality of care and support - Grade 4 - Good

Quality of staffing - Grade 4 - Good

Quality of management and leadership - Grade 4 - Good

This report and grades represent our assessment of the quality of the areas of performance which were examined during this inspection.

Grades for this care service may change following other regulatory activity. You can find the most up-to-date grades for this service by visiting our website www.careinspectorate.com or by calling us on 0345 600 9527 or visiting one of our offices.

2 How we inspected this service

The level of inspection we carried out

In this service we carried out a low intensity inspection. We carry out these inspections when we are satisfied that services are working hard to provide consistently high standards of care.

What we did during the inspection

We wrote this report after an inspection which took place between Tuesday 3 November 2015 and Wednesday 18 November 2015. We told the service a few days in advance of our intention to start the inspection. The inspection was undertaken by one Inspector. An inspection of the fostering agency took place at the same time by another inspector.

As requested by us, the adoption service sent us an annual return. They also completed a self-assessment of their service prior to the inspection starting.

We asked the service to send out short questionnaires to adopters and panel members. We received three responses from adoptive families and four responses from panel members.

In this inspection we gathered evidence from various sources, including the relevant sections of policies, procedures, records and other documents including:

- evidence from the services most recent self evaluation
- evaluations of the service collected by the service
- Midlothian Council website which contained information about - becoming an adopter
- adopters' files
- children's files.

We had discussion with:

- the manager of the adoption service
- the Children's social workers and their managers
- the Looked After Children Review Officer
- staff within the family placement team
- adoptive families and
- informal discussion with children.

We also attended a fostering panel.

Grading the service against quality themes and statements

We inspect and grade elements of care that we call 'quality themes'. For example, one of the quality themes we might look at is 'Quality of care and support'. Under each quality theme are 'quality statements' which describe what a service should be doing well for that theme. We grade how the service performs against the quality themes and statements.

Details of what we found are in Section 3: The inspection

Inspection Focus Areas (IFAs)

In any year we may decide on specific aspects of care to focus on during our inspections. These are extra checks we make on top of all the normal ones we make during inspection. We do this to gather information about the quality of these aspects of care on a national basis. Where we have examined an inspection focus area we will clearly identify it under the relevant quality statement.

Fire safety issues

We do not regulate fire safety. Local fire and rescue services are responsible for checking services. However, where significant fire safety issues become apparent, we will alert the relevant fire and rescue services so they may consider what action to take. You can find out more about care services' responsibilities for fire safety at www.firescotland.gov.uk

The annual return

Every year all care services must complete an 'annual return' form to make sure the information we hold is up to date. We also use annual returns to decide how we will inspect the service.

Annual Return Received: Yes - Electronic

Comments on Self Assessment

Every year all care services must complete a 'self assessment' form telling us how their service is performing. We check to make sure this assessment is accurate.

The self assessment was fully completed and supported the inspection process.

Taking the views of people using the care service into account

We spoke with three adoptive families and received written representations from a further three families. Their views and comments about the service are contained within the main body of the report.

Children in the sample were generally young. We observed children with their adoptive parents and noted a good quality of relationships.

Taking carers' views into account

We did not speak with birth parents as part of this inspection.

3 The inspection

We looked at how the service performs against the following quality themes and statements. Here are the details of what we found.

Quality Theme 1: Quality of Care and Support

Grade awarded for this theme: 4 - Good

Statement 1

"We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of the care and support provided by the service."

Service strengths

We looked at this statement at the time of the last inspection and assessed that there were good opportunities for adopters to make comments about the quality of support within the service. This statement was examined during this inspection as the participation of adopters and the children and young people in their care, is very important to achieving good outcomes for them.

In 2015-16 all services are being inspected against this statement. During this inspection we confirmed there continued to be opportunities to assess and improve the quality of support within the service.

The service told us in their self assessment about a number of ways in which adoptive families and birth families can influence aspects of care and support.

These included:

- requests for feedback at all stages of the assessment process
- access to the manager of the service at a second opinion visit

- good quality relationships between the staff of the agency and adoptive families so any issues can be discussed openly
- the promotion of partnership working between staff of the agency and adoptive families
- social workers work closely with children to ensure their views and needs are taken into account.

We considered evidence presented by the service and spoke with adoptive families. We considered, and adoptive families confirmed that the range of information available for people who wished to adopt in Midlothian was generally appropriate, and supported people to make decisions about becoming adopters.

Comments included:

- "We took part in a preparation course which provided very useful information as well as putting us in contact with other adopters which became an additional support network."

Adoptive families told us about the good working relationships with their workers. This supported them to be open during the assessment process and raise issues about the process of becoming adopters. Most adopters had continued with the same worker throughout the approval process and beyond. This supported them to feel connected to the service and engaged in the adoption process.

One adopter told us:

- "We both feel that in the future if we require any guidance we will not hesitate to contact our social worker."

We confirmed that formal feedback opportunities were in place and were used to inform service improvement where appropriate. This included questionnaires following preparation training and attendance at the panel.

Second opinion visits carried out by the manager of the service, provided opportunities for adopters to reflect on the preparation process and the quality of support they received.

Children, where they were of an age to do so, could write reports for 'Looked After Children Reviews' and be involved in planning for their future. Birth parents were routinely invited to meetings considering their children's future including adoption panel meetings - we could see that their views were taken into account when planning for children.

During our interviews with staff and managers within the service, we were told about a number of developments in relation to improving participation. We were told that the service intended to produce a newsletter aimed at keeping adoptive families up to date with what was happening within the service, and any future learning or development opportunities. Some adopters also confirmed that they had been invited to attend an adoption support group.

The service intended to consider facilitating groups for adopted children dependent of the ages and stages of children. We saw that these developments formed part of the service action plan.

Areas for improvement

The service provided a range of evidence for this inspection. This included a participation strategy for children using Midlothian Council Services. As part of this a 'Champions Group' had been established and the launch event had been well attended by over 40 children and young people.

A children's survey had been distributed asking for children's views about the performance of the council. We thought the service should build on this and translate the corporate strategy into a service wide strategy, to ensure that children and young people who had been adopted had a voice in relation to improving adoption services.

As children being placed for adoption are very young, this means that the service should seek to promote ongoing engagement for adoptive families - so that the children being adopted now will be able to engage in discussions about adoption when they are of an age to do so.

Two adoptive families told us they would have liked more practical information about finance including child benefit, adoption pay and legal costs for adoption petitions. We suggested that this should be factored into the preparation to become an adopter. This would support adopters to assess their finances more realistically and reduce potential stressors after children are placed and before the adoption order is granted.

When looking at children's files it appeared that there may have been some gaps in social workers visiting children. However, staff in the family placement team had seen children in the intervening periods. The service should take steps to ensure a full record of when the child had been seen is in the child's file.

In conclusion, we assessed that in relation to care and support issues, adopters had opportunities to raise issues individually and in some cases collectively and the Agency was likely to take action in respect of these.

We assessed that the service should continue to develop formal feedback opportunities for adopters and young people. Asking adopters to reflect on their journey at the end of the adoption process may support adopters to give a candid view of what has worked well and what areas could be improved. Similarly continuing to promote links to the agency post adoption can help young people who have been adopted become more involved in developing adoption services in the future. This has informed the grade of good for this statement.

Grade

4 - Good

Number of requirements - 0

Number of recommendations - 0

Statement 2

"We enable service users to make individual choices and ensure that every service user can be supported to achieve their potential."

Service strengths

We looked at this statement at the time of the last inspection and assessed that the Adoption Agency had made significant improvements in how they supported adopters and children to achieve their potential. We decided to consider this statement again at this inspection to consider whether this improvement had been sustained.

In their self assessment the agency told us that they:

- continued to link with other Adoption Agencies and adoption organisations to find families for children;
- had developed links between teams to ensure children in need of adoption were identified early and plans progressed appropriately;
- ensured good quality linking and matching of children with adoptive families
- ensured post adoption planning takes place.

During our inspection we saw that family finding was a high priority within the service and links had been formed with neighbouring local authorities to maximise choice of families for children. The sharing of resources between local authority areas supported a range of family options for children.

We assessed and the adoption panel reported, that written assessments, particularly for children had significantly improved. As children grew, the information in these assessments would support them in understanding their origins and developing a sense of identity.

Adopters told us they felt well prepared to take on the parenting role and one stated:

- "We felt very well prepared to become parents..... we found the training very beneficial covering a wide range of situations... helping us to make sense of our own personal strengths, weaknesses and abilities."

We noted continued improvement in planning for children aimed at reducing any drift and delay. Teams worked effectively together to quickly identify children in need of permanence and to ensure that assessments were carried out within appropriate timescales. Systems were flexible to meet the needs of the child, for example, additional adoption panels could be arranged or child care reviews could be brought forward. We noted improved confidence in staff when planning for adoption.

Matching and linking of children with families was of a good quality. Adopters found the information given to them from foster carers, education staff, medical staff and social workers helpful. Good levels of information supported adopters to make informed decisions about being able to provide good quality care for children.

The coordination process was the process by which the transition from foster carers to the adoptive family was planned. We saw that this was generally child centred and adopters told us they had benefitted from meeting with foster carers to review photographs and momentos so that each could be assigned meaning.

The service told us they planned to improve post adoption support planning. Some adopters told us they had attended life story training events. Where there were issues for families we saw that appropriate post adoption plans had been put in place.

Areas for improvement

We made a recommendation at the time of the last inspection in respect of post adoption work. We considered that there continued to be significant gaps in providing information to children in relation to their life story. None of the children in the sample we considered or other children we considered who had been adopted for some time, had a life story book or a later life letter. We considered that social workers were less confident in this area of work.

Although we assessed that the service were keen to improve in this area and had developed policies and included training and staff development in their action plan, we did not see that outcomes for children had particularly improved at the time of the inspection. We considered that there continued to be a need for the service to take this work forward. **(See recommendation 1 made under Quality Theme 1 – Statement 2).**

We saw for some children that there remained some evidence of delays in decision making. This was at times related to changes in staffing and at others the reasons for the delay were unclear. The service was aware of delays and had begun to take steps to address these. For example, where it was appropriate, some social workers in the family placement team had become case accountable social workers for children to complete life story work. We were satisfied that the 'framework for permanence' combined with improved partnership with locality staff was having an impact but we still considered that delays in some cases remained significant and could potentially affect outcomes for children and young people. We look forward to hearing about further improvement in this area at the next inspection.

We noted that one foster carer had identified that there perhaps needed to be more attention paid to when pets should be introduced during the coordination process – but that overall the coordination process was of a good quality particularly the time spent with the foster carer.

We tracked one child who was placed at a distance from Midlothian. We saw that support plans were in place, however questioned whether this plan had been fully implemented or that contingency plans were in place. For example the worker supporting the adopters left quite quickly after the children were placed, a life story book had not been developed by the time of the third coordination meeting and there was no evidence within the children's contact notes in their file that the children had been seen. The adopters told us they were unclear about who was advocating for, or supporting the children. Outwith the coordination minute, there were no clear written agreements in place with other agencies to support Midlothian children where this was necessary. **(See Recommendation 2 made under Quality Theme 1 - Statement 2).**

We thought many of the strengths associated with this statement were of a good or very good standard and supported positive outcomes for children. However, to maintain these positive outcomes, we assessed that the service should take action to address areas of improvement particularly around developing post adoption support including life story and progressing planning for children. We thought that the lack of this work was a significant gap in supporting children to develop a strong sense of identify and support stable families.

Grade

4 - Good

Number of requirements - 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations - 2

1. The service should ensure that post adoption work is completed for each child.

The 'Life Story' work should be completed with the adopter and child, if appropriate, to ensure that adopters have a comprehensive life story for their child.

A later life letter should be completed by the social worker or person who was witness to the child's journey.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 9: getting help.

2. The service should ensure that clear written agreements are in place about how children will be supported and these should be shared appropriately with adopters.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 8: after you move in.

Quality Theme 3: Quality of Staffing

Grade awarded for this theme: 4 - Good

Statement 1

"We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of staffing in the service."

Service strengths

We considered this statement at the time of the last inspection and assessed that there were good opportunities for adopters to make comments about the quality of staffing within the service. We decided to consider this statement again at this inspection to monitor any improvements

Strengths highlighted in Quality Theme 1 - Statement 1 are also relevant to this statement.

Within their self assessment, the service told us that adopters were invited to training events and can feedback on the quality of the presentation by staff.

Following our inspection we noted that some adopters had been involved in sharing their experiences of adoption with other adopters during preparation training. This supported staff to understand adoption from a number of different perspectives.

As panel members, adopters could make comment about the quality of the work of the service including the quality of assessment and planning by staff in the service.

Second opinion visits and coordination meetings offered prospective adopters an opportunity to speak directly with the manager of the service, and to make comments about the quality of work undertaken by the supervising social worker.

The service told us that they planned to support adopters to be involved in recruitment processes.

Areas for improvement

The service should develop increased opportunities for adopters, young people and birth parents to comment specifically on staffing issues and for this feedback to be linked to improvements in staff performance.

In conclusion we assessed that in relation to staffing issues, adopters had some opportunities to raise issues individually and collectively through the adoption panel and the Agency was likely to take action in respect of these. This has informed the grade of good for this statement.

Grade

4 - Good

Number of requirements - 0

Number of recommendations - 0

Statement 3

"We have a professional, trained and motivated workforce which operates to National Care Standards, legislation and best practice."

Service strengths

We looked at this statement at the time of the last inspection and at that time we assessed that the staff were operating at a good level within the agency. We decided to look at this statement again to measure any improvement. During this inspection we noted that many of the strengths of the staff continued to be in evidence.

In their self assessment the agency told us they were committed to ensuring their staff were professional, trained and motivated. They ensured regular supervision, appraisal, training and access to current research and best practice.

Since the last inspection two new social workers have been recruited to the family placement team, the team responsible for assessing and supporting adoptive families. A new manager had also been appointed. Staff reported that the new manager had been of positive benefit to the Agency and a new sense of creativity and service improvement has raised motivation levels generally within the team. Generally we noted that staff within the agency had a level of trust in their management. Managers were accessible and approachable.

There has been some turnover of staff in one of the locality teams and this has meant some changes for children. We noted some flexibility in how children were supported during times of change and have already reported on some poorer outcomes for children as a result of staff turnover. On a positive note, the emerging culture within the local authority means new staff are inducted into a role where partnership working across teams is the expectation and normal practice. The wider council aim is for all children's services staff to be based in the same building to support greater communication and working together.

During the inspection we confirmed that all staff within the agency were professional and appropriately registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The SSSC is the regulatory body for workers working in social care settings (www.sssc.com).

All Staff told us they regularly received supervision of a good quality and this supported them to feel confident in their work. Where appropriate all staff had had an annual appraisal where their training needs were identified.

All staff told us that they had very good access to training both internally and externally and we confirmed that there was a wide range of training available. Development sessions are organised regularly and attended by all staff in children's services and adoption panel members and children's hearing members. This supported shared understanding of issues and promoted partnership working. Staff told us they had recently attended a range of training appropriate to their role. We assessed that staff were confident in their work.

Regular team meetings supported staff to raise practice issues and discuss how they could improve the service. We noted that some staff were leading on key areas of service development such as developing an adoption newsletter.

We saw a well established and well used resource library which supported staff in their work and assisted them to keep up to date with emerging research and good practice.

Good links had been established with a number of agencies such as Scottish Adoption, Birth Link and Adapt Scotland.

All the adopters we spoke with told us that they thought their supervising social workers were knowledgeable and skilled in their work and as a result they felt well supported.

Areas for improvement

We assessed that there was a need for further staff development in the area of post adoption support. Staff generally appeared less confident in this area.

In conclusion, we noted that there were major strengths in the quality of staffing and the areas identified for improvement did not call into question the knowledge, skills or motivation of the staff group. However, we assessed that service now needed to maintain and build on this stability and take action in respect of the areas identified to ensure continued good practice. This has informed the grade of good for this statement.

Grade

5 - Very Good

Number of requirements - 0

Number of recommendations - 0

Quality Theme 4: Quality of Management and Leadership

Grade awarded for this theme: 4 - Good

Statement 1

"We ensure that service users and carers participate in assessing and improving the quality of the management and leadership of the service."

Service strengths

We considered this statement at the time of the last inspection and assessed that there were good opportunities for people who used the adoption service to make comments about the quality of the service. We decided to look at this statement again to monitor any improvements.

Strengths highlighted in Quality Theme 1 - Statement 1 and Quality Theme 3 - Statement 1 are also relevant to this statement.

Within their self assessment, the service told us that all adopters approved by Midlothian Council were subscribed to Adoption UK. Membership of this organisation kept adoptive families informed about national adoption initiatives and opportunities for adopters to participate in these.

The complaints process was well publicised within the organisation and although no complaints had been made, adopters felt confident that the service would positively respond to any issues raised.

Panel membership included one person who had adopted. This meant that comments could be made about a range of issues including the quality of management and leadership, the quality of assessment and the quality of decision making.

The service told us they planned to develop a participation strategy.

Areas for improvement

We saw that the agency was committed to involving people with experience of adoption more widely in the service. However, their attempts had not been as successful as they had hoped.

In conclusion, we assessed that in relation to management and leadership issues, adopters had some opportunities to raise issues individually through questionnaires during their preparation and in a more limited setting through the adoption panel. We assessed that the service should continue to develop formal feedback opportunities for adopters, young people and birth families.

Continuing to promote links to the agency post adoption can help adopters and young people who have been adopted become more involved in developing adoption services in the future. We have retained the grade of good but will continue to monitor engagement throughout the service.

Grade

4 - Good

Number of requirements - 0

Number of recommendations - 0

Statement 4

"We use quality assurance systems and processes which involve service users, carers, staff and stakeholders to assess the quality of service we provide"

Service strengths

We looked at this statement at the time of the last inspection and assessed that the Agency had adequate systems in place to support the quality of work they did. We decided to look at this statement again during this inspection to assess whether any improvements had been made.

In their self assessment the agency told us they monitored the quality of their service in a number of ways:

- An annual report was produced detailing the work of the agency and identifying improvements.
- A detailed action plan had been developed in response to feedback from staff, adopters, panel members, birth parents to promote service improvement.
- Benchmarking groups and 'Key Performance Indicators' were used to assess quality.
- Staff supervision and appraisal monitored the effectiveness of staff.
- The adoption panel supported the quality of work of the Agency.
- Surveys elicited views from a range of people including adopters, panel members and staff.

The 'Framework for Permanence' had continued to be developed. This provided managers with an effective overview of planning for children and supported them to identify any drift or delay for children. We saw how this overview had supported the service to develop guidance about contact and its role when placing children for adoption and also to identify the need for more availability for prospective adopters to attend preparatory training.

Staff reported the flowchart which had been produced supported them to feel confident in their work. A range of other policies and procedures supported consistency in practice across the local authority area. Regular staff supervision monitored staff practice and performance.

Clear policies and procedures in relation to file auditing were in place although we noted there could be some technical issue in relation to dates when these took place. We asked the service to check on this.

The adoption panel provided an important quality assurance measure for the service. We were not able to attend an adoption panel as part of this inspection. However, we elicited the views of the chairs of the panel and panel members and read the panel's annual report and development plan. Generally members of the panel thought the panel was working well. Most confirmed they had received an appraisal as a panel member and training had been identified.

Panel members could and did attend service development days organised through children's services. Panel business meetings were held regularly where panel members had opportunities to raise any issues, keep up to date with what was happening within the Adoption Agency and offer feedback to the agency in relation to the quality of its work.

Generally we saw that good links and relationships existed between the adoption panel and the Adoption Agency and this in turn supported good quality work in assessments and decision making for children in need of adoption.

Quality Assurance systems involved a range of key people. Adopters were asked about the quality of the service during their preparation and through membership of the fostering panel, and more informally through their relationship with their resource worker.

Staff raised issues at team meetings and had recently completed a staff survey.

Areas for improvement

The agency produced as evidence of their quality assurance systems, the 'Corporate Parenting Board Action Plan' which detailed a number of actions aimed at improving outcomes for 'Looked After Children'. As children who are adopted are not 'Looked After' it was difficult to understand how this related to these children. We asked the service to review their self assessment to ensure that appropriate information was recorded under each statement.

The team action plan focussed on recruitment of adoptive families, was in draft form and was out of date.

An adoption panel development plan for 2015 was submitted and identified some suggested areas for improvement. We did not see that these were included in the 'Adoption Service Action Plan' in an identifiable format.

The 'Adoption Service Action Plan' referenced specific action under each of the main Quality Statements used by the Care Inspectorate. However, we saw that many of these were at a very early stage particularly in regard to improving participatory opportunities for children who had been adopted and in post adoption support planning.

We concluded that there was no comprehensive plan of service improvement linked to an annual report of the whole Agency. We thought the service could actively improve in this area. **(See recommendation 1 made under Quality Theme 4 - Statement 4).**

Reports and plans could be shared more widely with service users, staff and stakeholders to build more transparency into the adoption agency. **(See recommendation 2 made under Quality Theme 4 - Statement 4).**

In conclusion, we noted that there were important strengths in the quality of management and leadership and the areas identified for improvement did not call into question the good practice in this area.

However, we assessed that the service now needed to build on these strengths and take action in respect of the areas identified to ensure continued good practice. This has informed the grade of good for this statement.

Grade

4 - Good

Number of requirements - 0

Recommendations

Number of recommendations - 2

1. The service should adopt a more comprehensive plan of service improvement linked to an annual report of the whole Agency.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 32: providing a good quality service.

2. The service should share reports and their future priorities with people who use the service and their stakeholders.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 32: providing a good quality service.

4 What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at our last inspection

Previous requirements

1. The provider must ensure that effective systems are in place to monitor visits to children, particularly those children placed outwith Midlothian. Where these visits are to be undertaken by another authority, clear records need to be kept in relation to any agreements reached.

This is in order to comply with: The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009, Regulation 46(2) which details the statutory minimum visiting pattern for children.

Timescales: within six months of the publication of this report.

This requirement was made on 16 May 2014

We saw that children had been visited regularly and within statutory timescales. We noted that the service had plans in place to monitor visits to children to ensure these took place at regular intervals. However, we noted some issues in relation to audit procedures, a need to ensure that children's files are kept up to date and that written agreements are in place and shared appropriately with adopters.

We have made a recommendation in respect of these areas.

(See recommendation 1 made under Quality Theme 1 - Statement 2).

Met - Within Timescales

5 What the service has done to meet any recommendations we made at our last inspection

Previous recommendations

1. This recommendation was made under Quality Theme 1 - Statement 2.

The service should ensure that post adoption work is completed for each child.

The "Life Story" work should be completed with the adopter and child, if appropriate, to ensure that adopters have comprehensive life story for their child.

A later life letter should be completed by the social worker or person who was witness to the child's journey.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 9: getting help.

This recommendation was made on 16 May 2014

The service submitted a detailed action plan advising how they would evidence (through key performance indicators) that this work had been completed. Policies and procedures had been updated to reflect when life story, later life letters and post adoption plans should be in place.

Work was to be completed by March 2015. Although we could see evidence of this work being undertaken, at the time of the inspection, we could not evidence that outcomes had improved for children.

We made a recommendation in respect of this.

(See Recommendation 2 made under Quality Theme 1 - Statement 2).

2. This recommendation was made under Quality Theme 4 - Statement 4.

The service should share their annual report and their future priorities with people who use the service and their stakeholders.

National Care Standards adoption agencies. Standard 32: providing a good quality service.

This recommendation was made on 16 May 2014

We did not see that the service had taken steps to address this recommendation and have made a recommendation following this inspection.

(See recommendation 2 made under Quality Theme 4 - Statement 4).

3. This recommendation was made under Quality Theme 4 - Statement 4.

The service should consider who their stakeholders are and how their views might influence service design

This recommendation was made on 16 May 2014

The service had identified adopters as their stakeholders and participants at adoption panels. Second opinion visits had been reviewed and feedback from panel attendance had been presented to all attendees.

6 Complaints

No complaints have been upheld, or partially upheld, since the last inspection.

7 Enforcements

We have taken no enforcement action against this care service since the last inspection.

8 Additional Information

There is no additional information.

9 Inspection and grading history

Date	Type	Gradings	
16 May 2014	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	4 - Good Not Assessed 4 - Good 3 - Adequate
27 May 2013	Announced (Short Notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	2 - Weak Not Assessed 4 - Good 3 - Adequate
22 May 2012	Announced (Short Notice)	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	3 - Adequate Not Assessed 4 - Good 4 - Good
23 Feb 2011	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	4 - Good Not Assessed Not Assessed 3 - Adequate
15 Mar 2010	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	3 - Adequate Not Assessed 4 - Good 3 - Adequate
5 Mar 2009	Announced	Care and support Environment Staffing Management and Leadership	3 - Adequate Not Assessed 2 - Weak 2 - Weak

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Contact Us

Care Inspectorate
Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

enquiries@careinspectorate.com

0345 600 9527

www.careinspectorate.com

 @careinspect

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