

Ofsted: Lack of foster carers mean children missing out on support



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Despite numbers of fostering households and foster carers in England being at their highest levels ever, these increases are not keeping up with demand in the sector, according to Ofsted's annual fostering statistics.

The number of foster carers in England has only increased by 4% since 2014, while the number of children in foster care has increased some 11%. And while the number of fostering households and carers has gone up, Ofsted research suggests that the range of carers available aren't always able to meet children's increasingly complex needs.

As the number of children in care continues to grow, matching them with the right carers becomes increasingly difficult. This makes it more likely that very vulnerable children will face placement breakdowns and further disruption to their lives.

Meanwhile, the number of family and friends fostering households is at its highest level yet. These carers are a vital part of the system – but their impact on overall capacity is limited by the nature of their role.

Although record levels of enquiries were received from prospective fostering households last year, statistics show these aren't translating into applications. Of 160,000 initial enquiries from prospective fostering households, only around 10,000 resulted in applications – a decrease on previous years.

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director for Social Care, said:

Today's statistics paint a bleak picture. Foster carers make

such a difference to children's lives. But year on year we see more children coming into foster care, and too few carers with the right skills to give them the support they deserve. How long can this go on before the care system reaches breaking point?

We rarely see children coming into care who don't need to be, but with the right help earlier, some may be able to remain with their families. We also need to urgently boost the number of foster carers, making sure they, and the children they care for, get the right support.

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