

# Adolescent and Children's Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Alex Turner
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11 September 2006

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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## 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**

The service is based in South London and operates as a fostering branch office of The Adolescent and Children's Trust. The service provides a range of placements for children/young people aged from birth to under 18 years. Services include outreach support to children and their families, supervised contact, parent and child placements and assessments.

### **Summary**

The inspection was announced. All of the key National Minimum Standards were inspected. Actions and recommendations included in the last report were followed up. None have been repeated. The service provides good quality foster care and support with some areas of outstanding practice.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

Record keeping, information and training in relation to promoting health have all been improved. Safeguarding procedures have been reviewed and contact with children is now more frequent. Information and training about education has been increased. Mechanisms to monitor and record children's achievements have been improved. Group work and activity programmes with looked after children and children who foster have been refined. A range of materials for care leavers and carers bringing up teenagers has been produced. Quality assurance procedures have been reviewed, a staff training policy and programme has been developed, additional training for managers has been introduced and electronic data systems updated.

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

The provision is good.

Children's health is promoted. Foster carers and staff work together to help ensure children's health needs are met. Knowledge of and links to health care services are good. Information, training and guidance covers practice in this area.

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

The provision is good.

The persons carrying on and managing the service are suitable to do so. Children are placed with foster carers who provide safe, comfortable homes. The suitability of foster carers' homes are assessed prior to their approval and subsequently monitored and kept under review. Children are placed with foster carers who provide a good match in terms of skills, experience and circumstance. Children are protected from abuse and neglect. The operation of the service is anchored on promoting the welfare and safety of children. Management systems maintain an oversight of, and scrutinise information relating to, circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. Foster carers are clear about their duty to promote the welfare and safety of children and how they put this into practice. Information, training and guidance covers practice in this area. The standard of records demonstrating how safe care and risks to children are considered and managed, is inconsistent. Recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff follow good practice in safeguarding children. The

fostering panel performs a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment of prospective foster carers' suitability to foster. The panel also considers the review of existing foster carers' suitability and terms of their approval. The quality of assessments coming to panel has varied. The panel is careful not to make recommendations where there is insufficient information to do so.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service values diversity. Information, training and guidance to foster carers incorporates equality issues and valuing diversity. Opportunities have been created for children to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies. The fostering service promotes educational achievement. Children are supported by their carers to do their best. Carers routinely encourage homework, liaise with schools, and attend meetings and other extra curriculum events. Additional training and tuition is arranged where there is a need to do so. Information, training and guidance covers practice in this area. Children's achievements are celebrated with their foster families and more publicly during awards events and activities arranged by the fostering service.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children are encouraged to maintain and develop positive family contacts and friendships. The fostering service considers the need for, and benefits of appropriate contact for the child during the matching process. Help and support is provided to the carer in dealing with any difficult contact issues that may arise. The service can provide a contact suite and manage arrangements for supervised contact. Children's views and opinions are valued by the fostering service. Children are routinely seen and spoken to by their foster carer's supervising social worker. Nearly all the children completing a written survey for this inspection indicate that their carers listen to them and take notice of their opinions. The fostering service also invests in activities to promote the voice of children including consultation weekends and involvement in recruitment, training events, decision making, information sharing and quality assurance.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers are contributing to the support to prepare children and young people for independent or semi-independent living. Training and support enables them to provide effective support and guidance to a young person preparing to move on. Foster carers understand that they need to provide appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. The fostering service ensures that each young person is consulted about their future and encouraged to be actively involved in decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan. The fostering service delivers a life skills programme for children in conjunction with any provision made by the child's own local authority.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Children are provided with information about what the fostering service sets out to do for them. Children are given information telling them what they can do if they are unhappy with the service provided. This information is expanded upon in that which is available to adults.

Management of the fostering service is in line with providing a good quality service to children. The process to assess potential carers' suitability to foster is in line with good practice guidelines. Tasks and workloads are designated to suitably qualified and experienced staff. The number of qualified social work and administrative staff is reviewed with reference to changing operational requirements. Social work practice is monitored and overseen by the manager of the fostering team. Records of visits, supervision and other social work tasks are not in all instances aligned with demonstrating high standards in fostering practice. Professional supervision and support is provided. Performance management tools are used though examples of change brought about by doing so are limited. Management of the service is well rated by foster carers and social workers of children that have been placed. Children are placed with carers who are trained and supported to provide safe and effective foster care. Foster carers have indicated the support and guidance they receive from the service is good and sometimes outstanding. Support includes training, advice, information, peer groups, out of hours help and practical assistance with child care. The quality of case records for children and foster carers varied between inadequate and outstanding. The range of mechanisms and resources used to inform, guide and support social work and fostering practice are not in all instances evident from the records that are kept. Poor record keeping detracts from the good quality of care reported by children, foster carers and social workers using the service and add little to the written history of children whilst they are with the service.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the application of systems to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and ensure remedial action is taken when necessary. NMS 25.3

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

#### Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

**Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.**

#### Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

**Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

**Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

**Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

**Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.**

#### Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

**Annex A**

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

**Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**