



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Regional Foster Placements (South West)  
Limited**

**South West Placements  
113 North Hill  
Plymouth  
PL4 8JY**

*Lead Inspector*  
Jim Palmer

*Announced Inspection*  
20th March 2006      10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk) or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

*Every Child Matters*, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	Regional Foster Placements (South West) Limited
<b>Address</b>	South West Placements 113 North Hill Plymouth PL4 8JY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01837 55674
<b>Fax number</b>	01837 55719
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Regional Foster Placements (South West) Ltd
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Jennifer Fitzgerald
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      N/A

## Brief Description of the Service:

South West Placements offer a range of placements for children and young people of all ages, in the geographical area of Devon, Somerset and Cornwall. These include planned and unplanned placements, long term, short term and respite care. The agency specialise in placements for children who have complex needs and may have had previous placement disruption. The agency works closely in conjunction with other professional such as health and education.

# SUMMARY

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

This was the first inspection of the Devon and Cornwall branch of South West Placements, and as such will act as a baseline audit for the service. The service is established Devon, Somerset and Cornwall, it has a main office in Plymouth with a further sub branch in Okehampton and a further branch in North Devon, which is about to open shortly.

The inspection took place between 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2006. The views of children, foster carers placing social workers, staff and managers were sought to enable the inspectors to make their judgements. Each of the office locations were visited and a sample of foster carer, children and staff files were examined. A support group was attended and two foster carers were visited at home.

Questionnaires returned indicated a high level of satisfaction with the service and foster carers told the inspectors that they felt well supported by their fostering social worker and that the company had provided a good level of post approval supervision and training.

During the course of the inspection a number of weaknesses were identified, these have lead to nine requirements and four good practice recommendations being made.

## **What the service does well:**

The agency has provided a high level of support to foster carers, the recording of foster carer supervision was detailed and of a high quality. The recently introduced post approval training programme for foster carers was comprehensive and foster carers said they felt their training needs were adequately met. There was evidence that the agency, gave careful consideration to the introduction of children to carers in respect of planned placements.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

As this was a first inspection this is not applicable

## **What they could do better:**

The fostering service must ensure that they provide carers with full information regarding the needs of all children placed, and that placement agreements detailing how those needs will be met are in place in every case.

They need to provide evidence of matching considerations, and ensure that foster carers do not exceed the usual fostering limit unless appropriate exemptions are in place.

The service needs to ensure that staff files contain all the required information to evidence that all staff are fit persons.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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Being Healthy

Staying Safe

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Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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# Being Healthy

## **The intended outcome for this Standard is:**

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

**The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:**

12

Health needs of children may not always be fully met as a result of variable health plans for the children placed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There was evidence that supervising social workers were discussing the health needs of children with foster carers, as part of supervision, this was confirmed through recordings of supervision sessions and discussions with carers. Children were been supported to attend specialist medical appointments; this was confirmed in individual interviews with foster carers, who said they were well supported in meeting the medical needs of children placed. Inspectors were told that the fostering social workers maintained links with appropriate health professionals.

In speaking with foster carers a mixed response was received regarding adequate information enabling them to meet medical needs. In some cases examined there was evidence that the service had placed children with out obtaining full information regarding their medical needs, particularly with reference to emergency placements.

Six children's files were examined; none of these held medical consent, neither were these found in foster placement agreements. One carer held written medical consent from the local authority. A copy was sent to the office to be held on the child's file before the end of this inspection.

Written health records were variable, although in all of the cases examined, children were registered with the relevant medical professionals.

There was evidence that carers had undertaken training in first aid

# 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):**

3,6,8,9,15,30

There is the potential that children, carers and their families may not be kept safe as a result of a lack of evidence based matching, individual safe care guidelines, an inexperienced panel, and missing information on staff files.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Manager was subject of a successful fit person interview and held the required qualification and previous experience to manage the service. The Manager has demonstrated that she has a sound knowledge regarding the safeguarding and promotion of welfare of children

Health and safety checks of carers' homes had been undertaken as part of the initial assessment process and there was evidence of risks being appropriately managed. Foster carers homes were risk assessed annually, these were renewed as part of the annual review process. There were risk assessments in place for identified hazards such as pets and use of foster carer transport.

Foster carers' homes, which were visited, were well maintained, homely, pleasant and able to meet the needs of the children placed there. In the cases inspected children did not on every occasion have their own room. In some cases siblings shared large bedroom accommodation; this had been comprehensively assessed and the arrangements examined were acceptable.

The pre approval training for foster carers included information on health and safety responsibilities and carers were given practice guidance.

When matching children to foster carers, there was evidence that a number of carers had been considered for particular children's as referrals were received by the agency. However, there was an absence of written evidence identifying the needs of children in relation to the skills and abilities of the carer, therefore the inspectors were unable to ascertain the effectiveness of the matching process. The agency must also ensure that foster carers do not exceed the usual fostering limit unless appropriate exemptions are obtained from the placing authority

The inspector was told that planned placement were carefully managed, with introductions taking place over a period of time to ensure that the correct match had been made. This was not possible in the case of emergency placements.

A document entitled Foster placement agreements were held on each carer's file examined. However, these did not hold any detail concerning the needs of the child, how these were to be met, by whom and in what time scale and as such, did not constitute a placement agreement.

The pre approval training included information on safeguarding children and the company provided care with their over all safe care practice guidelines. In some cases, Foster carers completed their own guidance around safe care. There was no single identifiable format for carers and supervising social workers to complete individualised and specific safe care procedures for each carer, with regard to each child placed.

Foster carers spoken to confirm that they had received child protection awareness training and were confident that they knew how to refer any concerns to the appropriate agencies.

The Manager had recently introduced a system to collate information concerning any allegations made. Carers were made aware of inappropriate sanctions.

There was evidence, particularly relating to emergency placement in which insufficient information was given to carers to adequately enable them to protect the foster child, their own children and themselves.

The files for all staff working for the agency were examined. There was some omission, as the files did not contain all the required information set out in Schedule 1. In particular, full employment histories were not always clearly stated and on all most every case, the CRB check had not requested either/or the POCA, POVA or Education Act check, some files did not contain all relevant certificates for training. One file did not contain a photograph of the member of staff.

Supervising social work staff were all professionally qualified social workers, those spoken to had a good knowledge of their role and an appropriate background and work experience. The service employed resource workers who worked closely with families to support the placement. All assessment examined had been carried out by professionally qualified social workers. The inspectors were impressed by the knowledge and professional approach and dedication demonstrated by some of the fostering social workers.

The inspectors observed one meeting of a Fostering panel, and undertook a meeting with the chair of the panel. This panel had only recently been formed and the panel observed was only the third time of meeting.

Notes from previous meetings of panel were seen on file.

The panel was inexperienced and lacked awareness of the parameters in which it operated. As a result, panel made recommendations to the decision maker that contravened the Fostering Regulations.

In interview with the Chair of Panel, the inspector was told that he had been approached by the company initially as a panel member but after a very short period, took on the role of Chair. Panel members had received brief initial training, but the chair felt that members would benefit from further training. The Chair was not able to confirm how other panel members were selected. The panel did have a written constitutions and policies and procedures whilst it did not have a quality assurance role a growing awareness was developing, which would be fed back to the company. The panel had a nominated Deputy Chair, in conversation with the inspector the Chair suggested that she might benefit from experience of chairing panel in his presence in order to develop her own skills. The chair is also aware of the maximum period they serve as panel members and told the inspector that he intended to recommend to the company that they start to consider a rolling programme of replacing panel members in order to maintain consistency.

The chair of panel had substantial experience and expertise in the area of child care practice although lacked the necessary technical knowledge related to Foster Care Regulations both the Chair and panel members require training in the National Minimum Standard and The fostering service Regulations 2002 in order that they meet the requirements of Regulation 24 (2)(b).

# 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

7,13,31

The educational attainment of children is supported by the agency. They could provide more written evidence to confirm that the cultural and individual needs of children are being met.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There was some evidence that awareness diversity had been addressed as part of the initial assessment process; however, there was no written evidence that these issues had been addressed specifically or as part of the matching process.

One placements was seen in practice to support the religious beliefs of children however there was no written evidence to suggest that this was a formal arrangement, set out in the placement plan or in a foster care agreement.

There was evidence on foster carers' supervision notes that supervising social workers had discussed the educational needs of children and that the carer had been supported in meeting the child's educational needs. This was verified by discussions with carers. The agency also provided resource workers who will support foster carers if a child is temporarily excluded from school.

Foster carers have the primary responsibility for liaising with schools and local colleges, if required fostering social workers will also liaise on behalf of carers. The agency did provide short term breaks for children; these are subject to the same processes and support as longer term arrangements

# 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10,11

Contact arrangements are supported by the agency but should be made more formal. Arrangements for consulting young people on the running of the service should be strengthened

## EVIDENCE:

Supervising social workers were ensuring that carers were supported in maintaining contact arrangements. Carers reported that they were aware of contact arrangements. However, the details of these arrangements were not specifically identified in placement plans or in the foster placement agreement.

Young people were encouraged and supported in attending reviews and planning meetings. Young people also had the opportunity to express their view at foster carers annual reviews. There was also some evidence that supervising social workers met separately with children in addition to the placing social workers role. Despite this approximately 50% of young peoples questionnaires returned indicated that whilst they had the opportunity to comment on their carers, they were not consulted more widely about how the fostering service was managed

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## 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)

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

29

Carers were paid promptly, however financial arrangements were not clearly set out in the placement agreement that could lead to misunderstandings around financial responsibilities

## EVIDENCE:

The inspectors were told that payments to carers were clear, understandable and paid promptly; any errors that may occur had been rectified in a timely manner. No foster carers raised payments as a concern however, it would have been positive to see each financial arrangements set out clearly with each area of responsibility defined in the placement agreement, particularly where they relate to additional expensive leisure activities/ holidays

# Management

## **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)
- 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

16,17,19,21,22,26

Generally, this service is well managed, there are adequate staff and carers who are well supported and provided with good opportunities for personal development, however weaknesses in foster care agreements meant that the terms and conditions for foster carers were not clearly defined which may leave children and carers vulnerable.



## **EVIDENCE:**

There was evidence of clear management structure and all staff spoken with was aware of lines of accountability. All social work staff received supervision from appropriately qualified supervisors. Each established office had dedicated administrative support, in the absence of one office administrator; those duties were covered by a colleague in one of the other two sub branches. All staff had written contacts and job descriptions.

There were sufficient suitably qualified and experienced staffs to meet the current needs of the fostering service. The company has written policies regarding training, supervision and workload distribution.

Staff received training opportunities, there was an annual appraisal scheme for all staff and staff told inspectors that they received a good level of professional development opportunities. There was evidence that joint training with foster carers being held regularly.

Foster Carer Agreements seen did not hold all the information required under Schedule 5, amongst information missing were the following; no terms of approval, one agreement in name of one carer, rather than both carers, no details of degree of training to be provided, named social worker not included, a lack of information relating to the placement of children and matters to be included in the placement agreement, the arrangements for meeting any legal liabilities for the carers, the need to comply with the terms of any foster placement agreement, the need to comply with Regulations 12,13

The agency demonstrated that the role of the foster carer had been effectively managed. Foster carers were supervised regularly and supervision notes were detailed. The agency had a strategy for developing carers via the use of support groups, and supervision and post registration training. Both foster carers and supervising social workers were clear as to their respective roles foster carers were given advice and guidance on dealing with other professional agencies such as health and education.

Out of hours support was availed to foster carers who confirmed that they were clear as to how their on call service was accessed. However, the inspectors were told that some of the staff providing on call support were not qualified social workers, never the less they had access to senior practitioners who were appropriately qualified. Staff providing the out of hours service were on call for a week at a time, this had been the subject of some debate within the staff team and there were mixed views about whether this was the most effective means of providing this cover.

The inspectors were shown copies of the post approval training programme that was provided for foster carers. Carers confirmed that they had attended

training and that supervising social workers discussed carers training needs as part of the supervision process and at annual review.

The agency has three office locations in Devon. The main office and Manager are located in Plymouth, there are two sub offices in Okehampton and Ilfracombe. Senior practitioners oversee practice at each sub office. There are facilities in each office for the secure retention of records in both locked rooms and locked steel cabinets. Access to each of the buildings is secure and there are adequate systems to back up computerised records. It was noted however that the Plymouth office is housed in a multi occupancy building and whilst access to the fostering service office is secure, training rooms maybe accessed by other users of the building including residents living on the upper floors and members of the public who access a contact centre operated by the agency and housed in the same building. Whilst this may not constitute a conflict of interest, it could present a risk to each of the separate groups of users of the building.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

**4** Standard Exceeded (Commendable)      **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)  
**2** Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)      **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	1

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	1
<b>9</b>	1
<b>15</b>	1
<b>30</b>	1

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	2
<b>13</b>	3
<b>31</b>	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	1
<b>11</b>	2

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	X
<b>29</b>	2

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	X
<b>2</b>	X
<b>4</b>	X
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	3
<b>17</b>	3
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	3
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	2
<b>22</b>	1
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	X
<b>25</b>	X
<b>26</b>	3
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	X

N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS8	34	The agency must be able to produce evidence of how children are matched to carers	01/11/06
2	FS8	34	Foster placement agreements must contain all the information required under Schedule 6	01/11/06
3	FS9	17	Foster carers must be provided with safe care guidelines which relate to the specific circumstances and needs of individual children	01/11/06
4	FS10	14	The detail of the arrangements for contact for each child must be clearly set out in the placement agreement	01/11/06
5	FS12	15	The agency must ensure that full information regarding the health needs of children is obtained and shared with carers for every child, prior to the placement commencing	01/11/06
6	FS12	15	Medical permission to administer treatment and first aid must be obtained and held for every child	01/11/06
7	FS15	20	The agency must obtain all the information under Schedule 1 in order to hold evidence regarding the fitness of staff	01/11/06

8	FS22	28	The service must ensure that foster care agreements contain all the information set out in Schedule 5	01/11/06
9	FS30	24	The service must provide sufficient training to the Chair and Deputy Chair of panel to ensure that they are able to demonstrate the skills necessary for chairing a foster panel	01/11/06
10	FS6	Reg 11(a)	The agency must promote the welfare of children placed, by not approving carers for more than the usual fostering limit as detailed in the Children Act 1989 Section 63. They may only place children above that limit if appropriate exemptions are in place.	01/11/06

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS7	The agency should provide written evidence that issue of diversity and individual need have been considered through out the matching process
2	FS11	The agency should devise a system to ensure that the views of children and families are ascertained regarding all matters concerning the service
3	FS29	Foster placement agreements should clearly set out financial arrangements for each child placed
4	FS21	The agency should consider changing its arrangements for out of hours support, in order to prevent staff fatigue

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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