



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Southampton City Council Fostering Services

**315 Coxford Road
Lordswood
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 5LH**

Lead Inspector
Lynda Mosling

Announced Inspection
30th October 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 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

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

Name of service	Southampton City Council Fostering Services
Address	315 Coxford Road Lordswood Southampton Hampshire SO16 5LH
Telephone number	023 8079 9100
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Southampton City Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Leigh Clarke
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Southampton Foster Care Services is part of the Children and Families Division of the Health and Social Care Directorate of Southampton City Council. The service provides a range of fostering services including specialist and intensive fostering schemes. The team recruits, supports and trains foster carers. There are currently approximately 143 approved fostering households providing places for a total of 247 young people.

The minimum fostering allowance is £114.87 per week rising to the maximum of £162.89. There are also Treatment Foster Carers who are paid a higher weekly fee.

SUMMARY

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

This report covers the key standards for the inspection of fostering services. The previous inspection was undertaken in February 2006 and much of the evidence remained unchanged.

Evidence was gained from a range of sources including: discussion with the manager, discussion with fostering staff, recruitment officer, visits to foster homes, where carers and young people were spoken with, questionnaire returns from carers and young people and reading of records.

The manager provided useful information prior to the inspection visits. A fostering panel was also observed.

What the service does well:

- Young people's health needs are assessed and met with the assistance of specialist services
- A dedicated nurse for Children Looked After undertakes the majority of the health assessments
- Training is given to those caring for young people with special health needs
- A 'healthy fun day' was arranged by the children's rights group to raise awareness of a variety of health issues
- Suitability of staff is tested by appropriate recruitment procedures
- Assessment of carers is thorough and includes all necessary checks
- Training in child protection issues is provided to all staff and carers
- There is an effective fostering panel in operation, with members from a variety of backgrounds
- The service promotes individual rights and differences
- A range of respite arrangements are supported by the service. Dreamwall and Abshott farm is particularly popular with young people
- Contact with relatives and friends is encouraged and supported
- The Children's Rights service, provided through Barnardo's, provides young people with a voice and opportunities to feedback to senior managers
- There is a clear statement of purpose that sets out the service provided
- The team is well managed and organised in an effective manner
- There are a good range of skills and experiences within the team

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The duty team have developed a system to ensure carers who are under investigation and/or 'on hold' are not contacted and offered placements of young people
- More targeted recruitment strategies have led to a greater response from potential carers
- Training for carers, particularly the attachment training, has felt more useful to carers
- Profiles of foster carers are developing
- Links have been made with community groups within the city to increase awareness of the need for carers across a large range
- 'Cool reading' programmes have been set up to encourage carers and young people to read
- The 'Blueprint project' has been set up to aid the stability of placements. This will include consultation with young people to use their experiences to inform planning.
- Further promotion of consideration of family and friends as carers

What they could do better:

- Recruit a larger number of carers in order to provide choice for young people
- Use the information held by young people and carers to assist with better matching
- Consider using independent people to undertake carer's exit interviews to enable honest feedback
- Routinely collect information about young people's cultural background, religion, sexuality etc to ensure provision is planned to meet their needs
- Ensure that young people's views about their experience of being fostered are circulated to carers for consideration, as well as managers
- Review the arrangements for transition of young people who are Looked After post 18 years
- Continue to review policies and procedures to take account of legislation changes and new initiatives

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 or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The fostering service promotes the healthy development of the young people placed in their services.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The service assesses the health needs of the young people prior to placement, or very soon after, placement. This assessment is undertaken by the 'Children Looked After' nurse and provides comprehensive information about the needs of the young people and how these should be met.

Foster carers generally take responsibility for arranging appointments with G.P's, dentists, opticians etc and those spoken to said they think it is a crucial part of their role.

Young people said that they are helped to choose a healthy diet and there were instances recorded where special diets were catered for.

Two of the foster homes visited were caring for children and young people with special medical needs. They said they felt they received good support from the fostering team and the local medical services. They had received training in how to provide medical care to the young people. In both cases the young people were benefiting greatly from being cared for in a family even though their special needs were complex and, at first glance, overwhelming.

Foster carers attend 'Introduction to Health' training that looks at the general needs of young people and how to access the appropriate advice and support. This covers sexual health, healthy eating and health and safety issues.

A recent training event on Attachment was seen by carers as very positive and they spoke of their enhanced understanding of young people's emotional health needs.

The health services to Looked After young people in the city includes: a consultant community paediatrician, a designated nurse, clinical psychologist and specialist nurses in sexual health.

The Southampton Children's Rights group provided by Barnardo's ran a healthy fun day in August 2006. The day was for young people, carers and their families and covered fire safety, first aid, positive relationships, oral hygiene, fitness, alcohol awareness, stopping smoking, good food etc. It was full of participation and appeared to have a positive effect on the young people's understanding of 'Being Healthy' and how to look after themselves. Feedback regarding this event will form part of the council's Healthy Care audit.

The fostering panel is in the process of appointing a panel member with a health background.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

Suitability of the manager and staff is tested through the council's recruitment procedures. The service provides a range of suitable foster carers although matching is still compromised by the lack of choice of available carers. Carers are trained in child protection processes and have a good understanding of their responsibilities. The people working in the service have been appropriately recruited and the necessary checks undertaken.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service has many years experience of working with Children Looked After and is well respected by staff and carers. She holds appropriate qualifications, including a management qualification.

The manager has over-sight of all of the fostering resources and special projects providing care to young people. This enables a clear idea of the needs of individual young people and the flexible use of the resources.

The team said they felt they were well managed and that support from the manager was 'sensible, helpful and accessible'.

During the inspection six foster carers were visited and/or spoken with. Information provided indicated that there is a wide range of carers who offer placements. One carer had fostered over 300 young people during her many years of fostering.

All of the foster carers seen were committed to the young people they were caring for. Those where the placements were long term had encompassed the foster children into their families and expected to provide on-going support after the placement ended.

The homes seen were providing suitable and comfortable accommodation for the fostered young people. The young people spoken to said they had everything they wanted in their rooms and felt 'safe' in their homes.

The fostering assessments were seen to be thorough and well written and cover all of the areas necessary to make good decisions about carer's suitability. Foster carer reviews were seen and the supervising social workers were able to explain the process they would use to re-consider the suitability of carers who were felt not to be able to provide a good service.

Re-assessments of suitability had been undertaken since the last inspection and some of the carers involved had spoken to the inspector. It is a fraught area with some carers feeling that they are powerless to effect a decision once 'the professionals minds have been made up'.

Another carer said that they had been de-registered without this ever having been discussed with them. This issue had been taken through the complaints procedure and a satisfactory solution reached.

Carers who had used the complaints procedure said the process had worked, but for some the lack of trust, and feelings of being disregarded, made the process feel unhelpful. The complaints process is in the process of being reviewed along side the Fostering Network's recommendations.

In an attempt to make the process fairer the service sometimes uses other carers in the assessment and decision making process, when considering suitability of carers.

Young people in their discussions with the Southampton Children's Rights Service provided by Barnardo's give a mixed view of their experience in foster care. The positive comments include, 'I like my foster home', 'I like my foster brother and foster sister' and 'the rules are OK'. Negative comments include, 'the rules are too tight', 'I don't get pocket money' and 'they give me a bed time that I don't like'. Any issues about particular foster placements, or serious concerns are taken up with the manager of the service.

The young people are given the opportunity to share their views with senior managers of the council.

Whilst the team has developed systems to improve the matching of young people requiring placement with available carers, including keeping profile sheets of carers, the reality is there are not enough available foster carers at any one time to provide the young people with a choice.

In common with other local authorities the service struggles to provide a placement for all of the young people referred. Their success in doing so is increasing. This is evidenced by the reducing numbers of young people being placed with independent agencies outside of the area.

The staff working in the service have good understanding and knowledge about the need to make good matches but feel their practice is compromised by lack of choice.

The service is planning a 'Blue print' project to look at ways of stabilising placements and therefore cut down on the number of moves for young people.

Whilst improvements in this area are acknowledged the standard is only partially met. Carers and young people said that they had experienced placements where the match is poor. Young people in particular said that they were rarely given a choice of carer and were not asked what 'they thought would work'.

It is recommended that the service use the knowledge of carers and young people more routinely to plan future placements.

The service promotes the safety of the young people in their care. Training is provided to staff and carers on child protection processes and all carers are made aware of the need to provide safe care.

Foster carers spoken to had a good understanding of the need to protect vulnerable young people, and their own families.

Incidents and allegations are dealt with appropriately by the team and there was recorded evidence of concerns being referred through the child protection route.

Systems to ensure young people's safety include: assessments of carers, training for carers and staff, no smacking policy, unannounced visits to carers, foster care handbook with information about what to do if there are concerns.

Risk assessments are undertaken to identify potential risks and carers spoke of the support they receive from the team when they are involved with children who are judged to be 'in danger'.

Young people spoken to said they felt 'safe' with their carers and also felt they had people they could talk to if they are worried.

The duty team are now clear about which carers should not be used i.e. those under investigation following concerns, and have a clear system on the available list of carers to ensure they are not approached for a placement.

All of the staff interviewed during the inspection had appropriate experience and background to undertake their roles. They presented as committed and enthusiastic about the service and said the team was 'a brilliant place' to work.

There are one or two vacancies within the team but these are actively being recruited to, and there was a general feeling that the staffing levels were OK. The team help each other out and were generous in their support to each other.

New staff confirmed that they had been recruited by processes that follow the council procedures. They said they had been given a thorough induction and felt they were protected from a full case load in the first few weeks of working with the team.

The fostering panel was observed and was seen to work effectively. The panel is jointly created with the Rose Road Association and has been set up according to the legislation. The members of the panel have a good range of experiences that they bring to the panel discussion.

The panel chair ensures that the members of the panel, and any observers, sign a confidentiality agreement.

Applicants attend panel and were seen to be put at their ease. Applicants can now have an approved foster carer as a mentor during their assessment process. They sometimes accompany the applicants to panel and provide welcome support.

The panel carefully considered the applications put to them and asked questions of the applicants in a sensitive way. During discussion everyone's views were taken account of and clearly recorded in the minutes.

Previous panel minutes were seen and showed clear records had been made of the recommendations made and the reasons for them.

Two new applications from foster carers, two first reviews and a de-registration were considered during the panel meeting. The chair ensured that the panel members were clear about their role and what was being asked of them at all stages.

Exit questionnaires are completed by foster carers and presented to panel. The information provided can sometimes be sparse. It is recommended that the service consider using independent people to undertake exit interviews with carers as a way of receiving helpful and honest feedback.

The panel has joint training with the fostering team where practice and policy issues are discussed.

All members of the panel said they enjoy their role and are committed to ensuring the welfare of Children Looked After. Their questions and considerations confirmed this view.

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.

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

7, 13 and 31.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The fostering service values diversity and incorporate diversity issues in training and supervision of carers. Educational achievement is seen as a priority and foster carers said they are supported to ensure young people have appropriate education provision. Respite placements recognise the value of the main carers.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The service has continued to try to recruit from a range of backgrounds. The recruitment officer explained the efforts he is making to make contacts with local groups including different religious groups, gay and lesbian groups etc, to get the message about fostering over to them. This has been well received.

The service has been promoting individual rights and celebrating young people's differences. This has been done during foster care training and supervision. Foster carers are gradually getting the message that all individuals deserve understanding and respect.

The majority of the young people placed are of white British descent, with just 10 young people of a different ethnic background. However, the team are very aware of the need to consider young people's diverse needs and there was evidence that young people with complex needs were valued and understood. The referral information to the team does not always identify the young people's religion, cultural background, sexuality etc so it is hard to tell whether young people's diverse needs are being met.

It is recommended that the children's services routinely collect this information in order to ensure young people's individual needs are being met.

The service is keen to improve the educational outcomes in the Children Looked After population. The information supplied by the service shows that only 15 (out of 159) young people are currently on fixed term exclusions and only 1 on permanent exclusion.

There is a joint agency group that looks at young people where education is a concern, and attempts to identify an appropriate resource. Foster carers said that they work with the agencies to support school placements and often make themselves available to help the school when the young person is struggling.

Everyone in the team were aware of the additional stress foster carers are under if the young person is not in school. It also severely restricts the choice of placement available.

Some foster carers explained that they had been instrumental in finding the appropriate school for the young person and were happy to transport outside of the local area if the particular school met the needs of the child. Other carers struggled to make such a commitment.

One of the team has an education liaison role and works closely with colleagues employed by education. The majority of the young people have personal education plans and these are up-dated on an on-going basis.

79% of young people leaving care were said to have at least 1 GCSE at grade A* - G, or a GNVQ, in the last 12 months, but only 5.4% achieved five or more of these qualifications.

The service has an annual celebration event that recognises the achievements of young people. This was appreciated by most of the carers and young people, although some young people chose not to attend as they feel it singles them out as 'fostered', which they did not enjoy.

Training for carers includes 'introduction to education' and 'cool reading' training. Cool reading is a programme run by the Hamlyn Project worker (Paul Hamlyn Publishing charity) which provides 'relaxed, realistic, reading sessions'

to encourage carers and young people to read. There is some financial incentive, and the sessions count towards the carers professional development.

Finance from the Children's Fund has been used to provide foster homes with a computer to support the educational needs of the young people placed.

There are a number of respite arrangements supported by the service. One of the most popular with the young people is the Dreamwall project. The project is an activity based camp that takes young people for short stays and helps them work together and enjoy physical challenges.

The carers and young people spoken to felt the attraction was partly due to the fact that the respite is seen as a benefit to the young people, rather than a break for the carers. Young people therefore do not feel rejected by the carer's use of the scheme.

The staff member who is linked to the project is very enthusiastic about the outcomes for the young people and has experienced first hand the challenges on offer.

In addition there is a new respite facility used, run by two approved foster carers. This is called Abshott Farm and provides up to 4 holiday placements for young people. Again it is an activity based service with cycling, horse riding and swimming on offer.

The service also uses other foster carers to provide respite and recruits carers who want to specifically provide short term stays. This appears to be happening more and more and is felt to be a preventative strategy for young people who may otherwise end up in care.

In all of the respite arrangements there was evidence that the main carers retain their involvement with the child and are seen as important in the process.

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.

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

10 and 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The service actively promotes contact with family and friends. Young People are consulted about the service in a variety of ways including the Children’s Rights Service provided by Barnardos.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The service promotes contact with family and friends by encouraging foster carers to take an active role in communicating with parents. Preparation training for carers includes information about the contact needs of young people, and there is a clear expectation that contact will happen, unless forbidden by the Court process.

Young people said, (on the completed questionnaires), that they meet with their families, although this wasn’t as frequent as some would like. Young people spoken to had a clear idea of the contact arrangements.

The service considers distance from family when making placements and supports carers in arranging transport to enable contact.

Most of the young people have mobile telephones and use these to make frequent contact with their family and friends.

The Children's Rights Service, provided by the city council through a contract with Barnardo's, aims to ensure that young people are involved in the decisions made about their lives.

The number of children and young people using the service has increased during the last 12 months. There have been a number of activities provided for young people to get together and share their views. These activities have included carers, siblings and staff from the social work section.

Young people have an opportunity to feedback to senior managers from the Department and have an input into the decision making process.

The report produced by the Children's Rights Service includes quotations from young people about their experiences in the Looked After system. It is a stark read, but is very valuable in understanding what is important to young people.

Whilst the report has been circulated within the department the group of carers spoken to had not seen it. The young people have written some very interesting comments about 'a foster carer should...'. This would be useful to use in foster care training. They also identify 'Care provision from heaven' and 'the downside of being looked after'.

It is recommended that carers are made aware of the views expressed by young people in order to understand the impact of their care.

The Blueprint-Project has also been set up since the last inspection and aims to involve young people in consultation to help long term placement planning. It will also look at the possible creation of a peer mentoring service.

There are a range of consultation processes available to young people across the city. However, young people spoken to said the reality of feeling involved in the service depends on the skill, interest and ability of individual social workers. There appeared to be a huge gap between those who had trust in their social workers and those who clearly didn't. (See comments regarding leaving care plans in the next section.)

Overall the service appears to be improving in its desire to consult with young people.

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):

14 and 29.

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**.

The carers and young people spoken to were anxious about the transitional arrangements for young people. Allowances to carers have changed to a banding system. This has caused some conflict but has generally been well received.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

During the inspection a number of concerns were shared about the transitional arrangements for 18+ years. The view was that young people are being pressurised into moving into independence before they are ready. This was felt to be driven by financial considerations.

The procedures for preparing young people in the Looked After system have been followed, but appear to largely ignore the emotional issues, particularly in cases where the young person has been in placement with the same carers for many years.

One young person asked to speak with inspectors to share her distress at the pressure she felt was being put on her to move into lodgings or a flat. This coincided with her starting at college and having to get accustomed to many new experiences. Whilst she and her carers were pleased that help and support is available to those who are ready to move on, the emotional needs of the young person meant that it was a very frightening prospect.

Other carers said that they had been told that they could not continue to receive fostering allowance once the young person reached 18 years and felt they either had to ask the young person to leave or accept a change of status to lodgings. They felt that the 18 yr cut off point was arbitrary and takes no account of the young person's actual needs.

Carers are left feeling worried about the healthy survival of the young people who are 'forced out' of care too quickly. There were examples given of young people who had made progress whilst in foster care, but who 'fell by the wayside' when they moved into independence.

Whilst this arrangement is not in the control of the fostering team it is having an impact on foster carers and the young people in placement.

In a submission from the Pathways team the above remarks were challenged. The team, whilst acknowledging that there are areas of conflict and anxiety regarding pathway plans, felt that the plans made are consistent with policy and procedure and include consultation with young people.

The Pathways team is engaged in a number of initiatives to address some of the issues raised, including a review of the transition policy and the budget holding arrangements and training for carers.

It is recommended that the council continue to review the current arrangements to ensure the welfare of the young people is safeguarded and their assessed needs met.

The service has been working on a plan to introduce different levels of allowance/fee that relates to the skill of the carers. This has been done incrementally and has led to some carers feeling that they have been 'down-graded'.

The scheme was well advertised and carers have a clear idea of what they need to do to move up the levels. This includes completing training and evidencing their skills in the fostering task.

For some carers this has proved a difficult notion and they feel that their past experience has not counted. However, the majority of the carers spoken to said they felt that the scheme is 'settling down' and that it has been helpful to have expectations clarified.

Financial restrictions have meant that the scheme has been introduced over a 3 year period and this has added to some carers frustration as they feel they

have qualified for the higher fees but need to wait until the necessary funding is available.

Carers spoken to did not raise finances as an 'deciding factor' in fostering and some indicated that they felt the allowances were generous.

Carers said 'payments arrive on time and any inaccuracies are quickly put right'.

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

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

There is a clear statement of purpose that sets out the service provided. The team is organised in a way that uses the skills and experience of the staff to best advantage. Staff were positive about the management within the team. There are currently some staff vacancies, but these are to be filled shortly. There is a clear strategy of support to carers that is generally felt to be positive. Young people's files are kept by the allocated child's social worker, but the records seen appeared satisfactory. Many of the current policies and procedures are due to be reviewed but all necessary records are kept. The local authority encourages the use of friends and family as carers.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose was seen and sets out the range of services provided. It includes the 16 principles of the placement strategy and the objectives of the service.

The foster carer assessment procedure is explained in the document, as is the complaints process.

The document covers all of the necessary information and was recently reviewed.

The fostering team has been organised to make the best use of people's individual skills and experience. The members of the team said they felt they worked well together and value each other's work. There was open dialogue between staff members and they felt they could question and challenge each other's practice.

All of the team have a named supervisor and said they were happy with the management support and supervision.

The duty arrangements were felt to be particularly useful and foster carers spoken to appreciate the response they get from the team. They said, 'there is always someone to talk to'.

There are currently a small number of vacancies within the team but there are plans for filling these posts. Staff said that they are happy to cover each other's work during absences, and were realistic about the pressures of working for the local authority.

The staff working in the team have a good range of experiences and skills. They have all been recruited through the appropriate procedures and have the necessary qualifications.

Whilst the team is always busy there appeared to be enough staff to ensure the priorities of the team were adequately covered. Staff presented as committed and enthusiastic about their work.

The service has a clear strategy for working with foster carers. This is discussed during the assessment process.

In the completed questionnaires the majority of carers said that they were well supported by the fostering team. The comments included: 'I enjoy fostering, most of the time and feel supported', 'I am provided with training and supported with practical needs such as equipment', and 'they have always talked things through with me if I am not too sure about what is involved or what I'm allowed to do'.

Carer's visited were positive about their relationship with the fostering team and felt their response was friendly and helpful.

Carer's who have been in dispute with the service said they felt that they had 'fallen out of favour' with the team and believed they had subsequently been overlooked when placements were arranged. There was no evidence available to confirm this view and the duty team, who arrange the majority of placements, were able to demonstrate their procedures for contacting available carers when a placement is needed.

Discussion with a group of foster carers indicated that carers often provide support to other carers when they are in conflict with the service.

Foster carer household reviews are undertaken annually and the initial ones are taken to panel for consideration.

Carers mentioned the lack of support from the children's social workers and felt they are under too much pressure. They said that the young people often do not have a relationship with their social worker and that little individual work is undertaken with the young people.

It is hoped that the planned re-organisation of children's services into which will create a team for Children Looked After may alleviate this situation.

The young people's case records are not kept in the fostering team, but are held by the allocated social worker. Some of the records are available on the Paris computer system, although it takes a while to trawl through the information to find the required information. Where there are chronologies available the process is greatly speeded up.

The information seen, relating to the young people, included the Looked After Children records and review information.

Carer's said that the information they receive about the young people is getting better, although there are still worrying gaps. When these occur it is often the fostering team that will seek the information to pass on.

The administrative records kept by the service meet the standards, although it was noted that many of the policies and procedures are either undergoing review, or are due for review.

Some of the team said they are not always up to date with their recording, but the majority of the files and records seen had the important information available.

Some improvement has been made in recording gaps in matching of placements and there has been an attempt to get profiles of carers that can be used with young people. Some carers are reluctant to have their family information set down in this way, but it would help young people who have to move into homes they have neither visited or have any information about.

The service promotes the use of family and friends as foster carers and the duty team ensure they check with the referring social worker that the possibility of placing with relatives etc has been explored.

Interim assessments are taken to the fostering panel in order to meet the timescales, and then followed up with a full assessment at a later stage.

Questionnaires completed by young people placed with relatives spoke of their pleasure that they are with their 'nanny' or other relative and the carers said they were grateful for the support they receive.

Further discussion is to take place about the payment and assessment process relating to kinship care.

The information provided by the service shows that there are currently 17 approved carers who are family or friends of the young person.

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>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	3

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	3

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

No

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

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	That the children's services routinely collect data about young people's religion, sexuality, cultural background etc to ensure individual needs are met.
2.	FS8	The service routinely use the knowledge and experience of carers and young people to inform the matching process.
3.	FS14	The children's services continue to review the current transition arrangements to ensure the welfare of young people reaching 18 years is safeguarded and their assessed needs met.
4.	FS30	Consider using independent people to undertake exit interviews with foster carers and produce this information to the fostering panel when they consider de-registration.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight
Ground Floor
Mill Court
Furrlongs
Newport, IOW
PO30 2AA

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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