



**Making Social Care
Better for People**

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Parallel Parents Ltd

**2nd Floor, Lansdown House,
85 Buxton Rd
Heaviley
Stockport
SK2 6LR**

Lead Inspector
Susan Winson

Announced Inspection
17th July 2006 09:30

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

| Reader Information | |
|---------------------------|---|
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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 | Parallel Parents Ltd |
| Address | 2nd Floor, Lansdown House, 85 Buxton Rd Heaviley Stockport SK2 6LR |
| Telephone number | 0161 477 5830 |
| Fax number | 0161 480 7991 |
| Email address | |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Parallel Parents Ltd |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | Mrs Sinead Leone Lewis |
| Type of registration | Fostering Agencies |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13/2/2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Parallel Parents is an independent fostering agency which has operated for many years. It is owned by Dr Fitzpatrick, who also owns the sister company, Care Today, which operates children's homes in the area. The agency has carers who live mainly in the North West of England and the Midlands. The staff team are based in Stockport, Stoke-on-Trent and the Midlands, although they all work from home.

The agency offers a comprehensive support system to the carers, including access to an education service, out of hours support system and respite care.

The agency provides care on a short and medium to long-term basis for children of all ages, including babies, siblings groups and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate mother and baby placements. The agency also offers disability placements. Fees vary according to the type of placement and the care package provided.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over two weeks and the inspector had the opportunity to speak with the manager, staff and a group of foster carers. Two foster carers were visited in their homes and four young people met with the inspector. A panel meeting was observed. Records of the agency were inspected.

At the time of the inspection the agency had 70 approved households providing a total of 124 places, 96 of which were filled. The majority of placements are long term.

Completed questionnaires were received from four foster carers, ten young people and four placing social workers.

What the service does well:

The agency is child focused, safety is a priority area and comprehensive risk assessments are in place. The agency has a committed and skilled staff group who are largely well managed to carry out their tasks.

The training and career progression for foster carers assists in retention and ensures that the agency retains a pool of carers who are skilled in meeting children's needs. Foster carers were positive about the quality and usefulness of training and said that they have opportunities to share ideas that are of benefit to young people.

Support to foster carers has been a consistent strength of the agency and foster carers again reported that they have access to advice from someone they know at all times. Support was described as "excellent" and "superb" by carers.

Young people and foster carers are consulted and involved in the development of the agency. Young people said they were involved in decisions which affect them and were listened to. A foster carer commented that the staff "listen to the children's opinions and discuss with the child before decisions are made".

The agency can demonstrate that young people make progress in foster homes and placement stability is good. Placing social workers were positive in their comments about how the agency supports and promotes health and education and works in partnership to meet young people's needs. Young people stated that their foster carers explain about "healthy eating and vitamins" and "doing exercise" and "always help me".

The agency's fostering panel is largely effective in scrutinising assessments and reviews of carers and has a clear role in quality assurance.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Young people have been informed of how to complain, both in writing from the manager and individually by foster care development workers on visits to homes.

Child protection basis training has now been enhanced by the use of the NSPCC training pack. Staff have been trained in the new legislation.

Monitoring of the quality of service children receive and outcomes has improved.

The records of supervisory visits have been reviewed and a new format has been introduced recently which allows for better monitoring by the manager.

The security of the building and storage of confidential information has improved.

What they could do better:

The agency needs to ensure that administrative staff have access to appropriate training and supervision.

Panel have received basic training and plans are in place to build on this.

The support to foster carers is being re-assessed with a view to providing varying levels of support as circumstances and children in placement change.

There are some outstanding training needs for some foster carers to assist them in meeting young people's needs. These include independent living preparation and leaving care, child protection and promoting education and health.

The agency would is in the process of clarifying the roles of the support workers and foster care development workers.

Problems with gaining full written information from placing social workers persists.

The sister company has residential homes and there is a need to clarify the use of residential care as respite placements for children in foster care and the role of staff working across the two companies.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Making a Positive Contribution

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

Quality in this outcome is good. The agency largely promotes the health and development of young people. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Problems in gaining full written health information from placing social workers persist. Although the agency is more active in pursuing missing documents, this needs to be pursued through other means than letters to social workers. One young person's last health assessment on file was in 2004 and there were no details of medical history or immunisations on some files. Not all foster care agreements sampled included specific ways in which individual young people's health would be promoted or their needs met. Some were out of date.

The agency can demonstrate that young people's health is promoted in practice in a variety of ways and health promotion is now mandatory for foster carers. This is carried out by a qualified nurse who is also able to undertake first aid training.

Where specialist health services have been needed these have been accessed by the young people. All of the files sampled demonstrated that young people are registered with a GP practice, attend regular optical and dental checkups and that foster carers ensure that immunisations are up to date. The agency monitors young people's annual health checks and over half have been carried out. The exceptions include young people who choose not to have them and those who refuse.

Foster carers are clear about their role in promoting healthy living and are active in encouraging young people to eat a healthy diet and take regular exercise. The young people were positive in their comments.

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 and 30

Quality in this outcome is good. The agency can demonstrate that its practices largely serve to protect young people. Staff and foster carers are suitable to work with children. The panel functions effectively. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Records show that appropriate procedures are in place for the recruitment of staff and CRB checks on both staff and carers are updated regularly and monitored by the manager.

Policies and procedures are in place for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers which are largely followed in practice, with the exception of one case where referees were not visited but were briefly interviewed by telephone. This is not in line with the agency's policies and procedures. The agency needs to have a better system for monitoring the assessment processes by both the manager and by panel.

The majority of foster carer assessments and annual reviews seen on this inspection were comprehensive and thorough in outlining strengths and training and support implications. They contain the social worker's analysis of the information and specific matching considerations. Foster carer reviews take place at regular intervals at foster carers' homes and are chaired by a foster care development worker who is not involved in the case. Written reports are prepared which are presented to panel for information and for quality control. It is evident that there is continual assessment of foster carers through their fostering career.

Careful matching, in which foster carers are involved, is evident from discussions with staff and foster carers. However, there is variation in the content of written foster placement agreements and the level to which they outline the tasks expected of foster carers and the specific ways in which the needs of young people will be met. The format has changed to include more information, such as the arrangements for young people to stay overnight with friends. The manager acknowledged that the agreement of placing social workers needs to be formalised and documented. The more comprehensive agreements contained full information about matching decisions and were clear about what the agency would provide and outlined how needs would be met on a day to day basis. The manager stated that she is addressing this and a new format for the agreements has recently been devised to ensure all the necessary information is included.

The agency does not have policies or procedures in place for disruption meetings, either to work with local authorities to look at a child's future or, internally, to allow the agency to examine its practice. The manager acknowledged that this is an area for development.

Unannounced visits to foster homes are not evidenced: although the foster carer development workers said that they carry these out, they are not always recorded as such.

Child protection incidents have been handled appropriately by the agency and all relevant people notified. All foster carers have a safe caring policy in place which the agency can demonstrate is being followed in practice. The agency is in the process of rolling out new child protection training to all foster carers.

Where young people are missing from home, procedures are in place which serve to safeguard their welfare. In one case, specific actions that the foster carers would follow were included in the foster placement agreement.

From discussions with foster carers and staff, and from records, it is clear that appropriate behaviour management strategies are in use in foster homes. Foster carer development workers discuss behaviour management regularly and monitor measures used. Foster carers were positive about the support they get from their workers in managing difficult behaviour and about the training they receive.

Following the last inspection letters have been sent to individual young people informing them of their right to complain and how to do so. Some supervision records of visits to foster carers include the information that foster care development workers have spoken to young people about complaints. Those complaints received by the agency since the last inspection have been properly investigated.

The agency has a consistent record of effective risk assessment and risk management planning. Health and safety checklists are carried out at the assessment stage and records show that these are updated on an annual basis or as necessary.

The panel is properly constituted and includes people with a variety of relevant experience. A panel meeting observed by the inspector was well chaired with everyone having the opportunity to put forward their views, queries and concerns. There was thorough discussion of a variety of issues and in-depth scrutiny of the information. Members had clearly read the papers beforehand and prepared their questions. Potential foster carers attend panel and members planned their questions beforehand. In addition to the approval of foster carers, all reviews are presented to panel for information.

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 and 13

Quality in this outcome is excellent. The agency can demonstrate that it values diversity and promotes educational achievement. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Meeting children's needs, including their cultural, ethnic and religious needs, is high profile within the agency. Numerous examples were given which show that young people's needs are being effectively met and foster carers are active in equipping themselves with relevant information through a variety of sources. There is access to a translation service which was used to make the inspector's questionnaire accessible to young people. Records demonstrate that cultural and religious needs have been discussed with young people in foster care and their wishes followed in respect of following their faith, diet and celebrations.

Records demonstrate that educational needs outlined in care plans are met in practice. Numerous examples of foster carers working with other professionals to promote educational achievement and support young people in school or college were given.

The sister company's education co-ordinator is involved with individual young people and carers, for example, in attending school meetings, advising on exclusion practices or in a general advisory role. The company's education database allows for the separate monitoring of children in foster care and shows that attendance is high, the majority of young people have current PEP's in place and very few young people are excluded from school. Where exclusions do happen, there are arrangements in place for the young people.

Training for foster carers is in place which raises awareness and informs carers about how they can promote educational achievement. In practice, it is clear that foster carers support young people in education in a variety of ways, attend school meetings and events and encourage young people to achieve.

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 and 11

Quality in this outcome is excellent. Contact is promoted and the agency consults with foster carers and young people and involves them in decision making. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency can demonstrate a commitment to enabling and encouraging young people to keep in contact with their families and friends. Arrangements for contact are outlined in the placement agreements. Examples were given where foster carers have supported young people to keep in contact with their families and friends, even over long distances.

The agency consults foster carers and young people in a variety of ways. Foster carers are clear that they have a voice within the agency and said that they can express their views, ideas and dissatisfactions openly with the confidence that they will be listened to. Several foster carers said they felt involved in developments of the service.

Placing social workers are asked for their contributions to foster carers' reviews in writing and where these are not received, foster carer development workers canvass their views by telephone and include their comments in the records. Young people in foster care and foster carers' own children are invited to contribute their comments and suggestions to the reviews.

Letters to all young people in placement with the agency are on files outlining their right to complain and how to do so. Foster care development workers have also noted in their recordings of supervisory visits that they have spoken to young people to ensure they understand.

It is clear from discussions and records that the agency and foster carers have listened to young people and advocated for changes on their behalf, for example, in regard to contact arrangements and a change of placement nearer to a child's home area.

The agency holds fun days which, the manager and staff said, gives them the opportunity to speak with foster carers and young people in an informal setting.

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 is good. Young people are prepared for adulthood. Foster carers receive agreed payments and expenses. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has a member of the social work team who is experienced in aftercare and who has started to deliver training to increase foster carers' knowledge and skills in preparing young people for adulthood. The training covers the role of the Personal Advisor and other services, what young people can expect from the leaving care team and the role of the foster carer in the acquisition of independence skills and in the young people's overall plans.

The new format of the foster carer agreement includes independence training issues, however, it has not yet been in use long enough to assess its effectiveness. The agency acknowledges the need to ensure forward planning is in place with regards to life skills training and leaving care.

Examples were given on visits to carers where young people have developed life skills and are encouraged to manage age-appropriate independence.

The carers were aware of their financial allowances and what they were expected to provide. They reported that they are paid on time and that an advance would be available if required. Carers receive a payslip to indicate their payment. The foster care agreement indicates what carers are expected to provide.

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):

4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26

Quality in this outcome is good. The agency is largely well managed and monitoring of practice and quality of service is improving. Foster carers and staff are well supported and supervised. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

There has been an improvement in the management monitoring systems which are now more effective. Foster care development workers send monthly information through to the manager, who also holds monitoring files for all the matters in Schedule 7 and exclusions from school and bullying.

A new quality assurance post has been created with clear lines of accountability but, as yet, no job description is in place to assist the manager in deploying staff effectively. This includes the identification of which placements need to have a support worker as well as a qualified social worker.

There are sufficient social work staff in the agency to ensure that assessments are only carried out by qualified workers. There are clear delineations between qualified social workers and unqualified support workers within the agency and the manager stated that she is working to clarify which tasks should only be undertaken by qualified social workers. One of the foster carer development workers has also been managing a children's home owned by the sister company. The manager is reviewing the viability of the dual role.

Staff report being well supervised and supported and records demonstrate that formal supervision is provided regularly and those staff who supervise have been appropriately trained. Appraisals take place regularly and address training and development needs. Staff training in the last year has included attachment, training the trainers, behaviour management, conflict resolution and child protection. Staff expressed satisfaction with the training available to them.

Team meetings take place regularly and have recently changed format to allow more time to discuss individual young people. They act as a forum for discussion and team support.

Foster carers have recently asked the agency to consider regular respite periods and the agency is looking, in consultation with carers, at how this can be achieved with the least disruption for young people. Where respite has been provided, it is clear from records and discussions with staff and foster carers that there has been proper handovers and that the two sets of foster carers have worked together in the interests of the young people concerned. The use of the sister company's children's homes for respite needs to be clarified.

Records of foster care development workers' supervisory visits to foster homes are variable and some are brief and do not link to care planning, so do not demonstrate that young people's needs are being met. A new format for recording the visits under the Every Child Matters outcomes has been recently implemented in draft form and the manager stated that this allows her to better monitor practice.

The majority of foster carers are visited by the staff of the agency on a regular basis and foster carers who met with the inspector were unanimous in praising the level and quality of support they receive. The agency's expectations of the frequency of supervisory visits to foster carers needs to be more explicit, especially the support provided to less experienced carers or those who have young people in placement whose behaviour is known to be challenging.

Foster carers who are new to the role are linked with an experienced foster carer for advice and support. All foster carers are members of a national agency which provides information and support.

The agency encourages foster carers to complete NVQ training and the career progression depends on achieving the qualification. Six foster carers have gained the award, seven have other relevant qualifications and 16 are working towards it. Retention of carers is good. The manager outlined that the agency is working to improve foster carer training take up and have recently canvassed carers about their preferred times of day.

Potential foster carers undertake 'skills to foster' training which covers the tasks of foster care, working together, safe care and understanding behaviour. The agency has provided a range of training for approved foster carers over the last year and topics include leaving care, health promotion, education awareness, managing difficult behaviour, nutrition, policies and procedures, recording, contact and caring for children who have been abused.

Young people's and foster carers' files are well organised, as are the agency records. There is appropriate administrative support. The panel administrator would benefit from training to improve the service to the panel.

The physical environment of the offices, which are shared with the sister company are appropriate and security and storage of confidential information has been improved. There is limited space but this reported not to cause any problems since the majority of staff work from home for at least part of their week.

The accounts of the agency were not available for the year 2005 to 2006, as they were with the auditors. Those from the previous year were seen on the last inspection and found to be satisfactory.

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 | 2 |

| STAYING SAFE | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 3 | 3 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 4 |
| 15 | 2 |
| 30 | 3 |

| ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 7 | 4 |
| 13 | 4 |
| 31 | N/A |

| MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 10 | 4 |
| 11 | 4 |

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

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 | FS15 | 20 and Schedule 1 | The registered person must ensure that written references are obtained for all foster carers and that the agency's policies are followed in respect of interviewing referees. | 30/09/06 |

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 | FS4 | The registered person should continue with plans to further improve the monitoring of the agency to ensure quality performance. |
| 2 | FS8 | The registered person should ensure that foster placement agreements are specific in outlining how young people's needs will be met. |
| 3 | FS8 | The registered person should have policies in place in regard to disruption meetings. |
| 4 | FS9 | The registered person should continue with plans to ensure that all foster carers have undertaken child protection training as a mandatory course prior to the placement of children. |
| 5 | FS9 | The registered person should ensure that unannounced visits to foster homes are carried out annually. |
| 5 | FS12 | The registered person should ensure that health care information is obtained from placing social workers to inform care planning. |
| 6 | FS16 | The registered person should continue to clarify the roles of staff in the agency. |
| 8 | FS22 | The registered person should continue to improve the quality of recording of supervisory visits to foster homes and clarify the frequency of the visits. |
| 9 | FS23 | The registered person should continue to provide training to foster carers, panel members and the administrator. |

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