



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Merton Fostering Services

**Worsfield House
Church Road
Mitcham
Surrey
CR4 3BE**

Lead Inspector
Jean Stuart

Announced Inspection
1 February 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

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	Merton Fostering Services
Address	Worsfield House Church Road Mitcham Surrey CR4 3BE
Telephone number	020 8545 4220
Fax number	020 8545 4203
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	London Borough of Merton
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Dawn Greenidge
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 17,18,20,21,26,28 January 05.

Brief Description of the Service:

Merton Fostering Service is a local authority service that provides short and long-term foster placements for children and young people aged from birth to 18 years old.

The service is based in Worsfold House, Mitcham, Surrey.

The day to day management of the service is the responsibility of the fostering manager. Support is given to sixty-five carers and seventy-eight children in placement.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection took place on 1,2,3 February 06 and lasted 21.5 hours. The manager and other staff assisted with the inspection.

Survey forms were sent to carers and children making use of the agency. Four carers were spoken with.

A variety of records, including care plans were looked at.

Dawn Greenidge, Fostering Manager and Anne Hignett, Service Manager attended the feedback session.

Merton fostering service continues to provide a good service to foster carers, the children and young people who are looked after.

What the service does well:

Conversations with carers and staff confirmed that the service provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Training continues throughout the carers' time with Merton Fostering service. Foster children and carers are asked before their reviews, for feedback in writing

The foster service maintains a case record for each foster child, and each foster carer.

The service matches children with carers in terms of race and culture.

Children and young people have progressed well with school and fulfilling their personal education plan.

Staff files contain the details required by regulation.

Psychological support is offered to carers and children.

Carers are completing national vocational qualifications in childcare.

Records are stored securely.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Merton Fostering now operates as one service covering both long term and task based care.

A training and development officer is employed for the fostering service.

Focus groups for carers initiated further courses to be developed.

Recruitment of carers is focused on certain groups to meet cultural/ethnic needs.

The fostering service is reiterating the importance to carers of their responsibilities and what to expect from the service.

An assistant team manager has been recruited.

Budgets are now monitored more closely.

What they could do better:

The manger has suggested certain areas she would like to develop:

The information pack for the recruitment fostering pack, and application form are to be revised.

Recruit carers from a wider group of people to give children more choice.

Staff to have greater access to specialist training.

Training and guidance to be given to panel members.

Promote the service through advertising on public transport, and use localised Internet services.

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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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

The health and development of children is central to the work carried out by the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Carers were very positive about ensuring the child's health needs are met. Carers spoke of taking the child to the Doctors or a specialist as necessary and arranging dental appointments. Attention is paid to health issues, including diet, personal hygiene and fitness.

Before a placement begins the carer is provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of the child. Consent for the child to receive medical treatment is documented in the "Looked After Children" (L.A.C.) forms, presented by the local authority to the fostering service. A record of the child's health needs is recorded in the carers log, this ensures that a current record is maintained and can be made available to the fostering service as necessary. The log of health needs also serves as a record for the child in the future. The initial document from the social worker and the ongoing record of a child's health needs ensures the carer does not overlook such matters.

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):

3,9,15,30.

The fostering service provides suitable fostering carers and protects each child from abuse. The people who work for the fostering service are suitable to work with children or young people. Children are protected from harm.

EVIDENCE:

Children are safeguarded and protected by each foster carer going through extensive assessment on their suitability to become a foster carer. A part of this process is to verify with other bodies such as the NSPCC, the local authority and the Criminal Records Bureau, that there is nothing in the individual's history to prevent them becoming a carer. References from past or present employers are collected. Care is taken to ensure that children are appropriately matched with carers who share the same cultural/ethnic background.

To ensure that the carer is able to meet the child's needs a monthly visit is carried out by the supervising social worker. A record is maintained of this visit.

This is a qualified and experienced team. The deputy post is a new addition to the team. The manager has many years experience in the social care field.

Administrative support is provided. The people who work in the fostering service are suitable to work with children.

Staff files indicated that recruitment is covered thoroughly. Employment histories are collected and checked, interviews are recorded, a CRB check is completed. Such steps help to prevent children from harm by the employment of poor quality staff.

Staff supervision is carried out monthly. Supervision is recorded. This enables the manager to consider how the individual is developing the necessary skills for the work and any future training needs.

Merton Fostering uses the All London Child Protection Procedures and gives guidance to staff and carers based on this.

The Chair conducted the Panel with strong leadership and had a good management style. The work of the Panel was shared between the members who asked searching questions about an individual's suitability, and for confirmation of other details. The manager intends to run workshops with panel members to establish a standard approach to assessments of foster carers. Merton fostering plans to have a good practice pack for use by the panel and other staff.

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.

Children cared for by a fostering service that values diversity and promotes equality.

EVIDENCE:

Carers are as far as possible are from the same cultural background as the child. If this is not possible, the carer will develop knowledge of the child's ethnicity. The fostering service ensures that foster carers provide care, which respects and preserves each child's ethnic and cultural background.

Foster carers give high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child. Carer reported that they attend parent's evenings and have discussions with teachers where appropriate. Children are expected to attend school.

Contact arrangements are made with the parents and child to ensure continuity in the child's life.

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.

Children's opinions and those of their family are sought over all issues affecting their daily life. Children's opinions are valued by the fostering service.

EVIDENCE:

Children are encouraged to make sure that they maintain and develop family contacts as set out in their care plan. The fostering service will take the steps necessary to make sure contact happens in a way that is safe for the child, and that the child will not come to harm. One carer reported that this is arranged four times a week for the children they foster. The local library and Home start service is used for the child to have supervised contact. For some children contact is always supervised by a professional involved with their care to prevent the child and the family from coming to any harm.

The foster carer keeps a log of each contact with the family or other significant person. If contact causes the child concern, the carer will report the matter to the child's social worker to ensure that appropriate people are aware of what is happening.

Children are aware that the foster carer will listen to their views and give advice when required. To hear more about children's opinions the Listening to Children officer holds meetings with children who are looked after, or who have left care, so that she can obtain their views. Children's views are sought by the supervising social worker prior to any annual review. This provides the opportunity for the child to say what is going well with the placement or what they would like to change. The agency aims to ensure that children realise their view is important.

The fostering service ensures that children in foster care know how to raise by any concerns or complaints. How to complain is referred to in the children's handbook and the carer's handbook. One child stated that they had "nothing to complain about". The fostering service has received complaints from children and foster carers. The reason for the complaint and the outcome is clearly documented.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

14,29.

Children preparing for adulthood are helped to develop skills, and knowledge for adult living.

EVIDENCE:

A carer spoke of how living skills are being developed with the child living with them. These include budgeting, cooking and household tasks. Carers are given a clear written requirement in the pathways document, of what is expected of them when preparing children for adulthood. Guidance is also set out in the carer's handbook.

Foster carers receive training and support to provide effective support. The work carried out by the carer and the contribution from the child is documented in the carers log. The pathways programme will provide the tools for the young person to live independently.

Carers reported that the allowances for fostering the child are always paid promptly and at the agreed time. The carer receives clear information about allowances. This allowance is recognition of the child's needs and the carer's contribution.

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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1,2,4,5,16,17,21,22,24,25.

The welfare of children is promoted and safeguarded by staff at Merton Fostering service, staff with appropriate skills manage the scheme. The agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

EVIDENCE:

Merton Fostering service provides care for a range of children from diverse backgrounds. The long term fostering service has now joined with the task based (short to medium) term service. The Statement of Purpose reflects the differing needs of children who can be accommodated by the scheme.

Children's needs are of paramount importance to the team. Staff are suitably experienced and qualified to provide professional care, staff aim to promote the welfare of the children. The organisation clearly sets out who is in charge when the manager is absent. Staff receive management supervision, in all areas of their work. A record is kept of supervision, supervision is planned in advance, ensuring that the supervising social workers follow good practice with regard to protecting and promoting the child's well being. The manager provides staff with strong leadership

Merton Fostering service informs carers, the manager and staff of their responsibilities. For carers responsibilities to children and to the fostering service are set out in their handbook, for staff in the manual. Foster carers sign a foster care agreement setting out the nature of fostering. Foster carers receive regular visits from the supervising social worker. The child is aware that people from the fostering service are there to help but knows that they there is also a social worker who is there to promote their interests.

To help the child understand events in their life, Merton Fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child. This encourages the child to reflect on and understand their family history.

The fostering agency records complaints from carers and children. A serious concern, which the complainant has chosen not to make formal, is not logged as a complaint. Consideration should be given as to whether a serious concern should be registered as a formal complaint whether or not the person concerned wishes it to be registered.

The premises used by Merton fostering service are suitable for their purpose.

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	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	X
8	x
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	3
29	3

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

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	25	Consideration should be given as to whether a serious concern should be registered as a formal complaint whether or not the person concerned wishes it to be registered.

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