



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Sandwell Local Authority Fostering Agency**

**Cristal House  
1 - 7 Cristal Drive  
Sandwell Business Park  
Smethwick  
West Midlands  
B66 1QG**

*Lead Inspector*  
Ms Linda Elsaleh

*Key Unannounced Inspection*  
21st August 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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	Sandwell Local Authority Fostering Agency
<b>Address</b>	Cristal House 1 - 7 Cristal Drive Sandwell Business Park Smethwick West Midlands B66 1QG
<b>Telephone number</b>	0845 352 8609
<b>Fax number</b>	
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      12<sup>th</sup> September 2005

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Sandwell Fostering Service is based in Smethwick and has a large number of experienced and highly committed foster carers. It provides foster care placements with approved foster carers for children and young people who are looked after by Sandwell Local Authority. It supports foster carers and placements of children/young people through the provision of a supervising social worker and can call upon specialist staff and services within social services, health and education fields, as appropriate. The service has been reorganised since the last inspection and is currently managed by an interim manager.

# **SUMMARY**

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

This visit was undertaken at short notice over four days. The main focus was to assess the fostering service's progress in meeting requirements made following previous inspections. This report is based on information provided by the manager, examination of relevant documents maintained by the service and comments provided by staff, carers, children/young people and relevant professionals.

Since the last inspection, the manager has left. A new manager has been appointed, but has not yet taken up the post. The post is being covered by an interim, temporary service manager. The service has made progress towards addressing the issues raised in the last report. There are plans for improvement in some areas, such as training, but these have not yet been implemented, as people have only recently been recruited to posts.

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

The fostering service's premises provide staff with a good working environment. They have access to appropriate facilities and equipment.

There are appropriate procedures for the recruitment and selection of qualified and experienced staff. There is an established staff team indicating a strong commitment by individuals in providing a good level of service to foster carers. The workers present as enthusiastic and optimistic.

Carers feel well supported by the service and children indicated that they feel well cared for.

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

A decision maker has joined the service. She takes the lead on the strategic development of the service.

The service has been restructured so that there are four divisions, which now includes the friends and family work, previously handled on the areas. Procedures have been developed and resources have been provided. All family and friends placements are now dealt with by the fostering service. This has resulted in improved consistency.

The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated to reflect the current conditions. All systems and processes are being reviewed to aid consistency of practice.

The service has developed a performance data set, showing the current number of foster carers. This is provided to the children's services manager on a monthly basis. There is also a new vacancy system, which is a tool to assist in the matching process and the provision of choice.

Concerns regarding Criminal Records Bureau checks have now been addressed and the process has been improved.

There is now a training officer for foster carers. There is a planned programme of training for carers.

There are plans to introduce new posts to the service, including 4 new assistant community support officers and a marketing officer. Additional senior practitioner posts have been created. There are fewer vacancies than in previous years, and the number of agency staff is being reduced. The level of staff sickness has reduced.

Feedback from foster carers confirmed that support to foster carers has improved, with social events being held and a monthly meeting introduced. Responses also indicated that there has been an improvement in the systems for ensuring prompt payment of allowances.

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

The list of vacancies needs to be improved so that it provides accurate data in relation to the places available.

Greater diligence is required in basic recording and files need to be better organised, so that there is consistency within and between files. Care needs to be taken to include information in files so that the reader can track decision making.

Records of staff supervision need to be more consistent and detailed.

There was little evidence of management systems for monitoring the service. Some work has been undertaken by the Quality Assessment and Development Unit, but the findings of the inspection indicate that generally management systems for monitoring the service need to be improved.

The recording of complaints and child protection investigations needs to be improved, so that details are provided of the nature and outcome of each issue. The service needs to implement a systematic approach to monitoring and reviewing these areas of its work.

Some placements are inconsistent with the terms of approval of the carers and records provided no evidence of the process by which the possible consequences of such placements had been assessed. Exemptions must be sought for these placements and records must be maintained of the risk assessments and decision making processes.

Efforts need to be made to ensure that there is a sufficient number of carers with the appropriate level of training, equipment and support to take emergency placements.

Workers require further guidance and training in completing risk assessments.

The service needs to provide all carers with sufficient details and clear processes in relation to consent to medical treatment and school trips.

Comments from carers indicated that they would welcome more support and preparation for their own children when starting to foster and on an ongoing basis.

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

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



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

# 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 overall judgement for this set of standards is adequate.

The fostering service continues to develop its relationships with LAC healthcare professionals to ensure children/young people's health care needs are being met. Information children/young people's health care and arrangements for consent to medical treatment need to be provided more promptly to foster carers.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Positive comments were received from children/young people about the care provided to them.

Health care needs are discussed as part of the 'Skills for Fostering' programme. The inspectors are unable to confirm that all approved foster carers receive regular training on health care issues, as detailed records are not available.

The services of a specialist nurse and doctor are used to undertake initial healthcare assessments. Children/young people's healthcare details are provided to foster carers as part of the matching process. At previous inspections it was noted that there were difficulties arising from the need for carers to obtain consent for medical treatment. At this inspection, carers provided evidence that there are still difficulties in this area, with carers sometimes going to great lengths to obtain the consent. Sandwell's Children's Services Procedures Manual and Fostering Handbook provides general guidance, but carers need clear consent in each case.

## Staying Safe

### The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

The overall judgement for this set of standards is adequate.

There is a suitable interim manager and a new manager has been appointed. The Fostering Service's recruitment and selection procedure ensures children/young people are cared for by suitable staff and fosters carers, but care needs to be taken to ensure that all placements are made within the terms of approval or appropriate exemptions are sought. A systematic approach needs to be taken to monitoring records and reports. The fostering panel is appropriately organised.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The service is currently being managed by an interim manager. A new permanent manager has been appointed and will take up post in the near future. There are suitable arrangements for a handover period.

Sandwell council has a standard procedure for the recruitment and selection of staff and this is followed for all staff. Records examined confirm appropriate procedures are followed for the approval of foster carers. Criminal Records Bureau checks are undertaken on all staff, carers and people who will have significant contact with the child. There is a system for renewing these checks.

Fostering social workers gave detailed descriptions of the process undertaken by them to match children/young people with suitable foster carers. The effectiveness of this process could be evidenced in some of the records. The majority of foster carers reported they were satisfied with this process. However, some placements made with foster carers are inconsistent with their terms of approval and the records provided no evidence that thorough consideration had been given to the possible consequences of making such placements. For example, on sampled files, where exemptions had been sought, there were no completed risk assessments, to justify exceeding the original terms. On sampled files the exemptions that have been agreed had not, in all cases, been reviewed by the specified date.

Information gathered in the data set and discussions with staff and carers indicated that there is a shortfall of carers to provide a service to the emergency duty team. Some carers do take emergency placements, but these are generally outside their approval status and require an exemption or variation. This practice means that emergency carers may not be appropriately trained or have suitable experience, support or equipment to undertake the task. The sole EDT carer is white, raising issues of choice and suitability.

Foster carers' homes are generally well maintained, decorated and furnished to a good standard. Some bedrooms have shared occupancy, sometimes with the carer's own child. Records are not available of agreements for such arrangements in all cases and no risk assessments were seen in relation to sharing rooms. The Fostering Handbook provides foster carers with information on home safety and areas of responsibility. There was no evidence that carers had received recent health and safety training. Regular health & safety assessments are carried out as part of the approval and review of foster carers. A copy of the completed Health & Safety Checklist is available on the files. However, there is no written guidance for carrying out these assessments and formal training is not provided to staff in this area.

Child protection issues are covered in the 'Skills for Fostering' training and information is available in the Fostering Handbook. However, fostering social workers and approved foster carers have not received any recent training updates.

Records relating to child protection investigations and their outcomes were found to be incomplete. The inspectors found it difficult to track the action which had been taken. Some minutes of meetings were not available. The service must ensure detailed information is kept of all child protection investigations and their outcomes. This is an outstanding requirement from previous inspections.

Acceptable measures of control are detailed in the Fostering Handbook with additional information and guidance on managing inappropriate behaviour.

Where issues of behaviour management have been raised with individual foster carers, appropriate discussions have taken place and, where applicable, training needs have been identified. There are suitable procedures for reporting children/young people who are missing/absent from the home without permission. Foster carers demonstrated good awareness of these procedures.

The service has developed a leaflet which provides basic information about the panel to attendees. Fostering Panel members are provided with the agenda and information for the meetings in advance. Examination of the records of panel meetings demonstrated panel members are thorough in their deliberations. They frequently identify issues that should be detailed more fully in the reports presented to them. Panel members defer making decisions if they consider the information provided is insufficient. The inspectors noted a large number of submissions to panel which were incomplete. Sampled carers' files revealed instances where matters had been noted as requiring review by the panel, but there was no evidence that this had taken place.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13,31

The overall judgement for this set of standards is good.

Foster carers encourage children/young people to achieve their educational potential and are supported in this task by the fostering social workers. However, they need to be provided with accurate information about consent arrangements for school trips and clear guidance about overnight stays. The service does not provide short term breaks. The fostering service provides information about its support for trans-racial placements to ensure the needs of the children/young people are being met.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The fostering service has some trans-racial placements. General information on valuing diversity and caring for children/young people from different cultures and religions is available in the Fostering Handbook. A new policy in relation to trans-racial placements is in draft form and was made available to the inspectors. This provides guidance to workers. The annual multicultural fun day took place in July and staff attended to promote the work of the service, recruit and meet with foster carers. There is also an Asian carer support group which meets on a bi-monthly basis.

Foster carers continue to encourage and support children/young people to achieve their educational potential. Achievements and concerns are discussed with the fostering social worker and the child/young person's social worker. The overall progress is discussed at statutory reviews. Foster carers reported inconsistencies in the service's response for arrangements for giving consent for children/young people to take part in school trips. This issue was raised at previous inspections. This information should be included in the Foster Placement Agreement.

# 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

The fostering service encourages children/young people to maintain relationships with their family and other significant people. There are good systems for consulting with children/young people.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The overall judgement for this set of standards is good.

The records examined and discussions held, demonstrate children/young people are encouraged to maintain contact, wherever possible, with their family and other significant people. Foster carers report good support from their fostering social workers whenever situations or areas of concern arise.

Children/young people confirmed that they had received a copy of the Children's Guide and how to make a complaint. There is a new system for recording complaints. However, this was found to contain no details about the content of the complaints or the action taken in response. A systematic approach to monitoring and reviewing complaints needs to be carried out. The children/young people confirmed that they are consulted about their individual care and the service.



# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

29

The overall judgement for this set of standards is good.

The service pays allowances and expenses to foster carers according to an agreed scale.

## EVIDENCE:

There is a clear written policy and contract detailing the allowances paid to the foster carers. The carers confirmed that they receive information about the allowances and expenses before each child/young person is placed with them and that payments are made appropriately.

# 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):**

**1, 4, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 & 32**

The overall judgement for this set of standards is adequate.

Information about the fostering service is available in the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide. The service operates from suitable premises. Enquiries about the service are responded to in an efficient manner.

The fostering service must implement a more consistent approach to maintaining, monitoring and evaluating the information it keeps to ensure satisfactory standards of care are being provided to children/young people.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The premises provide a suitable environment for the service to be based. There are suitable administrative systems in place and staff have access to computerised data.

The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and updated to reflect the current conditions. The Children's Guide has been produced and circulated. It is in a format that is suitable for the majority of the children/young people.

Appropriate procedures and suitable systems are followed for providing information about the service and the handling of financial matters.

The service has access to advice from a range of professionals.

Foster Care Agreements and Foster Placement Agreements were seen on sampled files. The Fostering Handbook has been revised to reflect the changes that have been made to policies, procedures and guidance.

The children/young people's files which were sampled are disorganised and incomplete. Various methods of recording information are being used and mixed entries of various spellings of names caused confusion for the reader. The manager informed that inspectors that a system of file auditing had recently been implemented and that several files were now brought to the manager as part of each staff supervision session. However, this system has only just started and none of the sampled files had yet benefited from this auditing.

Staff confirmed they receive regular supervision. Recordings were available on staff files, but the contents of these varied in quality. Care needs to be taken to ensure that these records are completed in sufficient detail. Staff files have record sheets to provide a summary of the dates on which supervision has taken place. These were not fully completed in the sampled files.

Minutes of staff meetings were made available. Foster carers receive regular supervision and staff described additional telephone contact and more informal visits to the carers in between formal supervision. They provided examples of specific visits which they had made to address certain issues and occasions when they had provided specific advice or training. Carers expressed satisfaction with the level of support and supervision provided.

There are regular support groups and these include a group for Asian carers. In addition, there have been events and social occasions. Comments received from carers indicated that they would appreciate more support for their own children at the time of initial training and on an ongoing basis as this is an area where development could take place. The quality of the records kept of foster carers' supervision sessions was found to vary in content.

'Out of hours' support is not provided by the service. However, the possibility of setting up a dedicated provision is being explored. In the meantime, when necessary, foster carers contact Sandwell's Emergency Duty Team for advice. Carers confirmed that they receive a good service when they contact this team.

Staff are responsible for booking their own training courses from Sandwell's training diary. At the previous inspection, staff reported that some courses were often over-subscribed or cancelled. This year there is little evidence of staff receiving formal training with the exception of managers. In order to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments a more planned approach must be taken towards individual and team training. This is an outstanding requirement from previous inspections.

There is little evidence of foster carers receiving training since the last inspection. However, a training officer has been identified and there is now a programme which meets the National Minimum Standards. The programme is based on the expectation that carers will attend three courses each year.

All staff guidance has been reviewed and revised. Business support staff have also made efforts to revise forms and other documents so that there is greater consistency and less duplication. The service is currently developing a system for de-registration in order to promote greater consistency when carers cease to foster.

The fostering social workers and children/young people's social workers report good levels of communication. However, there is little evidence to support these comments on the records.

Examination of assessment and review reports presented to the fostering panel show a need for a monitoring system to be implemented with regards to the quality of the information provided in order to reduce the number of deferred decisions being made by the panel. A system is also needed to ensure that matters which need to be reviewed by the panel are handled at the appropriate time.

There is no evidence to show that effective procedures are being used for the monitoring of the service's performance. Records seen were generally

incomplete. The inconsistencies in recording would suggest that monitoring is not taking place with sufficient rigour.

Family and friends placements are now within the service and staff reported that this arrangement is working well. The new arrangements promote a more consistent approach to these placements.

# 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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	2

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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	2

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

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

yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS12	17 and 34	The fostering service must ensure that arrangements for consent to medical treatment are included in each children/young people's Foster Placement Agreement.	01/01/07
2.	FS6	21	The fostering service must ensure that fostering social workers receive health & safety training in order to complete risk assessments appropriately.	01/04/07
3.	FS8	28	The fostering service must ensure the terms of approval for each foster carer are kept up to date.	01/01/07
4.	FS8	34	The fostering service must ensure that all placements made are within the terms of approval, or exemptions are sought, following appropriate risk assessment.	01/01/07
5.	FS13	34	The fostering service must ensure appropriate details are included in Foster Placement Agreements for obtaining/giving consent for a child/young person to participate in school trips and stay overnight with friends.	01/01/07

6.	FS4	42	The fostering service must implement a system for monitoring records and reports to ensure that all recording is up to date and accurate.	01/04/07
7.	FS4	42	The fostering service must regularly monitor & review its performance.	01/04/07
8.	FS19	21	The fostering service must implement planned training and development programmes for staff.	01/04/07
9.	FS21	17	Foster carers must be provided with ongoing training and accurate records must be kept of the training received by each carer	01/04/07
10.	FS24	22,30	The fostering service must implement appropriate systems for compiling & maintaining case files in good order.	01/04/07

## 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.	FS11	It is recommended that the service maintains more detailed records of complaints and child protection issues, ensuring that outcomes are clearly explained.
2.	FS21	It is recommended that the service offers additional support to the children of carers.



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