

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sussex Fostering & Childrens Services

Cophall Farmhouse
Bay Tree Lane
Polegate
East Sussex
BN26 6QL

Lead Inspector Lindy Latreille

Announced Inspection 9,10 & 11 October 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

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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 Sussex Fostering & Childrens Services

Address Cophall Farmhouse

Bay Tree Lane

Polegate East Sussex BN26 6QL

Telephone number 01323 733887

Fax number

Email address sfcs_polegate@yahoo.co.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)

Sussex Fostering & Children's Services Limited

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Mrs Elfriede Benjamin

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. That foster placements be provided for children of both sexes between the ages of 0 - 18 years

Date of last inspection 31st October 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Sussex Fostering and Children's' Services is an independent fostering agency which operates from Cophall Farmhouse on the outskirts of Polegate, East Sussex. The Agency was previously known as Banya Eastbourne and was a part of a larger agency that was based in London.

Sussex Fostering and Children's Services became independent in 2005 and relocated the office to Cophall Farm. The service is small, it having 12 approved sets of foster carers and 13 young people placed during this inspection. The service shares a fostering panel with the Banya Agency based in London. Information about the service can be obtained from the Agency and the present fees are £808.00 weekly.

SUMMARY

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

The announced inspection took place over three days and was conducted by one Inspector. Interviews were held with the responsible individual, the service manager, two supervising social workers and the office administrator. Four households were visited and six foster carers and six young people consulted. Contact was made with four placing social workers who spoke positively about the service. The London panel sat during the inspection week and was observed by a Regulation Inspector from the local office. A variety of documents maintained by the Agency were read together with the last report that was used for information where no change in circumstances was indicated.

What the service does well:

Being a small service the staff team consider that they are able to keep fully aware of all the needs of the foster carers and the young people that they foster. There is good communication between the staff of the Agency and much informal supervision. The fostering service provides well-trained staff and foster carers who are child centred and determined in their efforts to meet the needs of the young people placed. All identified health needs are met and appropriate education is in place for all the young people. If a young person is excluded from school the Agency provides a support worker to assist the foster carers. The young people are carefully placed with foster carers and where possible an introductory process takes place. A thorough matching process is well recorded, assisting in safe and stable outcomes. The Agency organise, and the foster carers encourage, a wide range of interests and activities to enable the young people to develop their full potential and support for contact is very good. The strategy for supporting foster carers includes training and regular visits, telephone and e-mail contact from a supervising social worker and an on-call service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Recommendations from the last report have been put in place. The system of monitoring records is more consistently used and recruitment files have references recorded.

What they could do better:

All annual foster carers reviews must be carried out. The Agency needs to ensure that foster carers unitise their training and fully understand the effects of transition and loss on the emotional development of Looked After Children

(LAC). All foster carers should complete training in the storage, recording and administration of medication. The primary carer of each household must be qualified as a first aider. The Agency should develop a written plan of care and health passport, to incorporate all verbal information, and guide foster carers in their care of the young people placed; this must clarify the arrangements for medical consent. Incidents of safeguarding and child protection instigated and consequent outcomes must be notified to the Commission for Social Care Inspection and recorded. Recorded strategies must be developed with the placing authorities for all young people identified as vulnerable. Written safe caring guidelines must be in place for each household, and include the management of access to unsafe computer sites. The Agency staff and foster carers must attend a training update in safeguarding measures for the protection of children. Risk assessments must be in place relating to activities arranged by the Agency and to address the vulnerability of individual young people. An accident book should be maintained by the Agency and training should be provided in the use of body maps. A quality assurance programme must be developed. The Agency must record the foster carers' responsibilities with regard to the management of the young people's monies, savings and provision of toiletries. In recruitment copies of qualifications must state that the originals have been seen together with a signature and date to confirm this. Supervising social workers need to monitor the daily records written by the foster carers to ensure that young person is progressing in their placement.

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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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.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The identified health needs of the young people are met and a healthy lifestyle is promoted throughout the fostering service. Some foster carers are not been trained in first aid or medication; and none are given a written health record for each young person placed.

EVIDENCE:

When placements are made the referral information is collected and passed on to foster carers; much of this information is collated at the placement and 28day review meetings. The Fostering Service do accept emergency placements and in a some cases essential information regarding the young people was not on file, despite clear efforts by the Fostering Service to obtain it. All basic expectations are covered in the Foster Care Agreement, but the detailed health care of each young person is not recorded, though foster carers confirmed a high level of verbal information. The Agency should develop a written health record that can be updated during the placement and move with the young person as a permanent record. Foster carers and the supervising social workers confirmed that all young people are registered with local health practitioners and attend their LAC medicals; foster carers record these appointments. A small number of the young people were receiving specialist medical attention, one from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and in house play therapy and self esteem group work. The Fostering Service has access to consultancy from a local GP. The foster carers visited were well aware of the young people's identified health needs, and their responsibilities to use their own observation skills to identify any new health problems and promote a healthy lifestyle. Comments made by young people

included "I know what is good for me and what is not." And "I walk everywhere and we have masses of good food." As part of their preparation, foster carers undertake training in health and well-being and HIV/AIDS this is supported by information in the foster carers' handbook. Some of the foster carers have a first aid qualification. No training for the foster carers has been provided in the storage, administration and recording of medication. Foster carers attend the young people's statutory Looked After Children (LAC) reviews and offer information regarding their healthcare. The Agency needs to be clear in its information to foster carers about the provision of toiletries.

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

The Agency needs to recognise, notify and record all incidents of safeguarding and maintain standards of safety for the young people placed.

EVIDENCE:

The Registered Manager is a qualified social worker, counsellor and nurse, and Responsible Individual a qualified teacher and play therapist. Both are suitably experienced and qualified to run the Agency and have all the required checks and references in place.

The fostering service endeavours that young people are provided with safe and nurturing environments; but this cannot be reassured if annual foster carers reviews are not carried out. Some of these reviews of foster carers have not been done so homes have not continued to be safety checked. Transport is vetted as part of these checks, to make sure that appropriate insurance is in place and that the family vehicles meet safety standards; which again could not be evidenced, as some annual checks were incomplete. Information was seen on file regarding the latest requirements to provide booster seats for young people under twelve years old. The accommodation visited was

welcoming and homely, with plenty of equipment and toys around for the young people to use. One young person commented, "it's really good here" All of the young people placed have an individual bedroom, with the exception of sibling girls.

Evidence of matching considerations was detailed on the files scrutinised. The feedback as a whole showed that the placements made are successful. There is no written guidance for foster carers to inform them of the needs of the young people when Looked After Children (LAC) documentation is not available. One comment made by a placing social worker was "Excellent and dedicated foster carers". The young people are not generally offered a choice of placement, but the Fostering Service ensures a careful introduction takes place, with visits to the young people by the foster carers and a graduated settling in process where possible. Foster carers details are included in a leaflet given to the young people to explain the household and pets etc.

Foster carers interviewed were very aware of the precautions they need to take to keep everybody safe but the foster homes do not have self-caring guidelines in place; though foster carers confirmed that it was discussed during their preparation course. The fostering service does not have risk assessments drawing together all information regarding the possible risks to the young people or those around them. A variety of behaviour management training is delivered regularly and all foster carers have signed a fostering agreement not use any type of corporal punishment.

Some incidents identified safeguarding concerns of financial and sexual abuse, and it was not documented as to how the Agency had managed these episodes or who had responsibility for actioning any safeguarding methods or eventual outcomes. The responsible individual explained that there had been discussions with the placing authority but no meetings or strategies had been developed and the Agency remained concerned to protect the vulnerability of the young people. As the Agency had not followed procedures they were directed to contact East Sussex Safeguarding Board for an assessment of the situation. All foster carers inform the Agency of significant accidents and this information is added to the files, and foster carers record in their daily logs. The Agency does not hold an accident book so auditing of accidents and injuries is time consuming. Body maps are not used to record injuries to the young people. Specific training is offered in safeguarding skills and procedure, which includes information on bullying and working with young people who have been abused. These subjects are included in preparation training but are not part of a rolling programme.

One allegation has been made against a foster carer since the last inspection. The foster carer showed poor judgement in thinking that a person without a Criminal Records Bureau check could offer supervision to a young person. This was thoroughly investigated and addressed by the Agency, but not identified as an allegation and recorded as such. Recording by foster carers includes the highlighting of any incidents where the young people's safety has in any way been compromised. The Agency needs to be clear to foster carers about their

responsibilities with regard to the management of the young people's monies and savings.

Recruitment checks identified that all the required checks are in place, but not always recorded. Files seen substantiated this. Some files had copies of qualifications but did not state that the originals were seen together with a signature and date to confirm this. There has not been any new staff since the last inspection but the Registered Manager is aware that interview notes are to be recorded to substantiate gaps in employment and confirm why any position working with children ended. All social work staff employed by the Fostering Service are qualified and registered with the General Social Care Council. Not all staff have had an annual appraisal though Criminal Records Bureau checks are being renewed.

The fostering panel, which monitors the assessment of potential foster carers has a broad and experienced representation. Contact was made with the Commission for Social Care Inspection Inspector who recently attended a panel meeting and there were some omissions in the preparation of assessments, Criminal Records Bureau checks for adult members of a foster carers' family and some confusion as regards to the chair of the panel making decisions in certain circumstances.

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 of this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Young people have access to a wide range of activities and opportunities and the Agency are proactive to meet educational and cultural needs.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service provides basic equal opportunities and diversity training for foster carers, as part of the preparation process and it is incorporated into their on-going training programme. In discussion with the Fostering Service it appears a number of useful contacts are available to them and they will be approached when needed to provide support, training and consultancy to foster carers. Good evidence was available to suggest that foster carers provide encouragement, equal access to opportunities and a wide range of activities, in order to develop the young people's talents, interests and hobbies. Some very good examples of this were observed when visiting foster homes including fishing, skateboarding and cycling -with appropriate safety equipment, basketball, music lessons, bowling and family outings to places of interest. Young people were actively involved in the families' lifestyles and interests. Foster carers commented on how confidence and self-esteem seemed to grow, alongside developing new skills and taking responsibility for helping around the home. Foster carers confirmed the training received during their preparation about diversity but some were unaware of exactly where in their neighbour they would access such resources.

Foster carers are active in ensuring appropriate education is provided for all the young people. One foster carer identified her role in supporting one young person with constant liaison with the school to good effect. Young people excluded from school are supported by the Agency and good arrangements are made to continue education and support the foster carers. All of the young people have Personal Education Plans (PEP) in place and foster carers confirmed their are regular attendance at school events and supporting their education, this includes providing access to a computer and helping with homework. Foster carers spoke of information regarding the safe sites on computers being discussed at preparation, but identified that they were concerned as to the access by one young person and so consequently prevented use. There was no involvement with the Agency concerning this matter.

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 of this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

There are good systems in place that promote safe contact between young people and their birth families. The Fostering Service enables foster carers and young people to contribute their views, so that positive outcomes are achieved.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carers are good at encouraging and enabling contact with the families of the young people placed with them. Evidence presented showed that they were responsive to young people's requests and needs, going out of their way to secure positive outcomes and offering support, to help them cope with emotions often associated with these meetings. The Fostering Service offers guidance to support foster carers in this area of work and the recording viewed was comprehensive.

The level of complaints and allegations is very low, though foster carers and young people were aware of how to make a complaint, and indicated that the young people are kept safe. Feedback is sought from the young people, the foster carers and placing social workers regarding the foster carers' annual reviews. The young people are also consulted at least every six weeks, as part of feedback from activities provided by the Agency. The children of foster carers are currently involved in the consultation process and express their views on their experience of fostering. The responses received all indicated a high level of satisfaction and included the following comments: "Both the

Agency and the foster carers work well with the local authority and facilitate the voice of the child at all times." "They always listen to me". Foster carers reported that they felt the Fostering Service valued their views; these are often collected at support meetings where foster carers can discuss issues together with Fostering Service staff. The young people are encouraged to attend their LAC reviews and notes of these meetings were found on file. The Fostering Service has tried to make these meetings child friendly by enabling the young person to attend for as long as they like.

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):

There are no key standards to assess in this section of the report and no concerns have been raised since the last inspection or in recent reports.

EVIDENCE:

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):

4,17,21 and 24.

Quality of this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service operates with a well-qualified team of staff and a range of foster carers but lacks the structure of a quality assurance programme. Case records are adequate, but progress reports are only produced for each young person's review providing irregular monitoring.

EVIDENCE:

The Registered Manager manages the business side of the Agency and the Responsible Individual leads on all fostering matters and works in the capacity of a supervising social worker from time to time. The service needs to develop a quality assurance programme so that all matters are monitored throughout the year to fulfil Schedule 7.

Staff who work for the Fostering Service are suitably qualified and access training to update their knowledge and skills. Foster carers feel that there are adequate staff to meet their needs and the needs of the young people placed. The fostering service recognise that in the future they will need to recruit foster carers with specialist skills, in order to match the needs of the young people referred, Foster carers are all required to complete a comprehensive 'Skills to Foster' training course prior to their approval. This is delivered over 6 sessions and foster carers found it very informative and a good basis for further training. Further training is provided throughout the year together with more specialised information, sometimes in response to requests from foster carers. Minutes from panel meetings confirmed a good level of assessment by the Agency for new foster carers.

The strategy for supporting foster carers includes training; fortnightly visits from a supervising social worker and an on-call service. The visits are recorded and the foster carers are given a copy. Annual performance reviews have taken place but many have lapsed. Feedback from all foster carers contacted regarding the support they receive was very good. Their comments included, "I can always make contact....they are so supportive" "They are always on the end of the phone." The support meetings are generally well attended and valued by the foster carers. According to the foster carers, working partnerships between placing social workers and the supervising social workers are variable, but they did not see this as fault of the supervising social workers. One placing social workers contacted commented that it was sometimes difficult to make telephone contact with the Agency.

Supervising social workers monitor all aspects of foster carers' performance but not all monitor the recording made by the foster carers. Case records are maintained by the Agency for all young people and verbal feedback is presented at their LAC reviews, or written reports if the supervising social workers cannot attend. The Inspector felt that this feedback could be recorded in detail in order to provide a clear record of the young person's progress. The young people are encouraged to keep a record of their life while fostered assisted by their foster carers. This takes a variety of forms, such as photographs and mementos from significant moments in their lives. Some foster carers help them to produce interesting memory boxes and scrap books.

Foster carers used suitable facilities for the storage of records and information. A checklist is in place to monitor file contents, which has prompted many letters from the Administrator to local authorities, chasing missing documents. The Agency needs to be more robust in seeking this information.

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		
Standard No	Score	
12	2	

STAYING SAFE		
Standard No	Score	
3	3	
6	3	
8	3	
9	1	
15	2	
30	X	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING		
Standard No Score		
7	3	
13	3	
31	X	

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION		
Standard No	Score	
10	3	
11	3	

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC		
WELLBEING		
Standard No	Score	
14	X	
29	X	

MANAGEMENT		
Standard No	Score	
1	X	
2	X	
4	1	
5	X	
16	X	
17	X 3 X	
18	X	
19	X	
20	X	
21	X 3 X	
22	X	
23	X	
24	X 3 X	
25	X	
26	X	
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	FS12	17(1)	All foster carers should complete training in the storage, recording and administration of medication.	28/02/07
2	FS12	17(1)	That foster carers are guided in the effects of transition on the emotional development of Looked After Children.	31/12/06
3	FS12	17(1)	That foster carers are qualified in first aid.	31/03/07
4	FS9	11(a)	That the Agency ensures the foster carers are aware of the plan of care in the last review a written plan of care for the young people placed.	31/12/06
5	FS9	43(1)(2)	That incidents of safeguarding and child protection must be notified to the appropriate bodies in line with East Sussex safeguarding procedures.	12/10/06
6	FS9	43(1)(2)	That the Commission for Social Care Inspection is informed of any incidents identified in Schedule 8.	12/10/06
7	FS9	12(1)(a)(b)	That a written safe caring policy is in place for each household.	31/03/07
8	FS9	12(1)(a)(b)	That risk assessments must be in place relating to activities and vulnerability.	31/03/07

9	FS9	17(1)	That foster carers are guided about their responsibilities with regard to the management of the young people's monies, savings and provision of toiletries.	12/11/06
10	FS9	17(1)	That staff and foster carers attend an update in safeguarding measures for the protection of young people.	31/01/07
11	FS17	31(1)(2)	That the Agency maintains a register of foster carers.	31/03/07
12	FS4	42(1)(a)(b)	That a quality assurance programme be developed in line with Schedule 7.	31/03/07

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	FS12	That an accident book should be maintained by the Agency and training provided for foster carers in the use of body maps.
2	FS15	That copies of qualifications state that the originals have been seen and confirmed with a signature and date.
3	FS17	That supervising social workers monitor foster carers' recordings to ensure the progress of each young person placed.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

East Sussex Area Office Ivy House 3 Ivy Terrace Eastbourne East Sussex BN21 4QT

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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