



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sheffield Local Authority Fostering

**Floor 2 Castle Market Building
Exchange Street
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S1 2AH**

Lead Inspector
Stella Henderson

Announced Inspection
8th November 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	Sheffield Local Authority Fostering
Address	Floor 2 Castle Market Building Exchange Street Sheffield South Yorkshire S1 2AH
Telephone number	0114 273 5155
Fax number	0114 273 4492
Email address	none
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Family Placement Service (SCC)
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Paul Harold Massey
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 7th September 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Sheffield's Local Authority Family Placement service provides foster care as part of a full range of accommodation for 'looked after' children and young people. The service also provides carers for children and young people with a physical or learning disability where the child and their family are in need of respite care. There are several different types of placements that carers are approved for, based on individual need, behaviour, age or gender. These include task-centred (mainly short term placements), permanence, short breaks for children with disabilities, respite care, remand care or family support care. The fostering services offices are based in the centre of Sheffield and can be easily accessed by members of the public.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out over approximately four days. Evidence was obtained from a variety of sources, such as case files, policies, records, and other information provided by the manager. Discussions were held with the manager and staff from the family placement team, placing social workers and visits were made to foster carers and children in placement. Their views, and those of their foster carers also made an important contribution to this inspection, as did the comments in questionnaires returned from children, foster carers and placing social workers. Information from the Children's Right's team, the Education of Looked After Children team and the Looked After Children Health Team also helped to inform this report

What the service does well:

Carers generally feel well supported, and there was a good deal of feedback about individual fostering officers with respect to their helpfulness and professionalism. Children and young people are supported in their education and their health and welfare is promoted. The fostering service is good at consulting with children and young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The new fostering manager has made a lot of progress in improving the service since the last inspection, in particular in demonstrating the good work that the family placement team undertakes. The service has undergone restructuring and this is viewed positively by staff, carers and stake-holders. A Corporate Parenting Manager has been appointed, and the service has developed a new out of hours service for carers, a reference group for carers and a support group for the children of carers.

What they could do better:

There needs to be improved safeguarding through panel arrangements, and matching procedures needs to be more clearly evidenced. Out of category placements should be reduced, and panel should oversee the number of variations and exemptions agreed.

Some of the shortfalls identified in this report will easily be achieved by closer attention to detail and better administrative and quality assurance systems. Others require a more significant, immediate and fundamental step-change, particularly as there are breaches of regulation that, for the second year of inspection, have still not been met.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. A high priority is given to the health and well-being of children looked after by the fostering service. Foster carers are supported to ensure optimum health outcomes for children in their care. Every child and young person must receive annual health assessments.

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

EVIDENCE:

The service promotes the health and development of children and young people in a number of ways. Children and young people who returned their questionnaires indicated that they are given support and advice regarding healthy food and healthy lifestyles. "My foster carer makes sure that I have plenty of food and vegetables" was a typical comment.

Some young people noted on their questionnaires that they were given opportunities to become involved in exercise such as swimming, netball and football. Specific leisure and links with sporting outlets, for example, the local ice hockey and football teams, are provided for Looked After Children, and specific discounts have been negotiated on the use of local sports centres and swimming pools.

Staff in the Looked After Children health team ensure that children and young people are up to date with immunisations. Health reviews for young people focus on issues relevant to their lives such as smoking, drugs and sexual health. There are also financial incentives for young people to participate in their health assessment reviews.

Performance on the completion of annual health assessments has improved, although there is still further improvement to be achieved with regard to these assessments and dental checks, particularly as this failing has been outstanding now for two years.

This may be helped by the administration for these assessments being located within the health team, rather than in social work teams. Foster carers visited by the inspector kept health records for children and young people and understood the importance of maintaining these records. Older children are encouraged to participate in a review health assessment by means of financial rewards.

A health hotline, whereby foster carers can contact the health team directly, was reported by carers to be of benefit.

Children and young people have access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, but information gathering systems need to be developed to track the outcomes for children and young people who receive this service.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. Carers and staff have a high awareness of child protection and anti-bullying guidelines. Children are placed with carers who are appropriately vetted and supported, but reasons for matching children and carers must be more evident.

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

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service is suitably experienced and qualified, as is the acting manager.

Children and young people are protected by clear behaviour management policies. Safe caring and home safety checks had been undertaken, and foster carers spoken to were conversant with child protection and anti-bullying guidelines. No child or young person reported, in their questionnaires, bullying within the foster home, but two reported being bullied at school. However, one commented "I was bullied (at school) but I got it sorted out by telling my foster carers – they made sure it got sorted out right away".

Prospective foster carers are thoroughly assessed before being brought to panel, and assessment reports were found to be analytical and evidence-based. Relevant training is provided to prepare them for the task of fostering.

Conversations with foster carers and evidence from questionnaires and files sampled, indicated, in the majority of cases, that children are placed with carers who have the skills and competences to match their assessed needs. There are high rates of placement stability and children and young people are therefore able to develop secure attachments. One young person commented "I feel safe here".

Safeguarding mechanisms do need to be developed, however. For example, although allegations against foster carers are properly dealt with, the service has no information as to which of those carers, if any, are referred to POCA, as the police deal with this. The service must either make these referrals themselves, or be able to obtain feedback from the police who has or has not been referred to POCA and the outcome of those referrals. At the time of writing this report a new procedure was due to be implemented to address this issue.

The service also needs to demonstrate more clearly how they are achieving appropriate matches, and foster placement agreements must be provided for each placement and must contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement, and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer.

Delegating this function, where placements in independent fostering agencies are concerned, to social workers and the contracts department, has the potential to undermine this process. This was evident in a recent inappropriate placement being made and the children concerned having to be placed in a third placement in a very short period of time.

The service must do more to reduce the number of 'out of category placements', and keep tight limits on the number of variations and exemptions. Panel has an important part to play here. Although scrutiny of panel minutes and observation of panel found it to be functioning well, with members engaging in rigorous discussion before recommendations for approval were made, the quality assurance role of panel needs to be developed.

Panel should monitor the number of variations and exemptions being agreed, and provide an annual report on the activities of the service, giving feedback about any concerns or gaps in provision, thereby broadening the range of options available to children and young people.

Feedback has already been given to the manager about issues regarding inquorate panels and declarations of interest. In the interests of transparency and accountability, the manager of the service should not be the decision-maker.

Panel is in the process of advertising for a care-experienced individual to be part of panel.

Personnel records were checked and were found to be compliant against Schedule 1 of these regulations. Foster carers were aware that they might be interviewed as part of the inspection process.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7, 13, 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. The fostering service demonstrates the importance of school and that school is important to achieving good outcomes. Every effort is made to achieve appropriate matching in terms of ethnicity and culture. Carers work well with parents of children with disability.

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

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is rated very highly by carers in terms of promoting equality and diversity by foster carers. One carer stated that "Sheffield Council have always been steadfast in the positive outlook to equality in every respect". A fostering support worker is provided to support both black and ethnic minority carers, who also have their own support group, and for carers dealing with trans-racial placements. Diversity training is available for all foster carers.

Children placed with carers from the disabilities short break scheme have positive links with the Inclusion, Play and Leisure services to ensure provision of a co-ordinated service to children with disability. A support group is being established for the children of foster carers.

"They put education as a priority" was an opinion expressed by several carers. Children and young people reported being supported in their school work and with their homework. A dedicated team liaises with both school and carers to

support children and young people with their education, and the service employs a fostering support worker specifically to focus on attainment and achievement of looked after children. Personal education plans are completed in the majority of cases.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. The service is developing a participation strategy for the full and active involvement of children and young people at every level.

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

EVIDENCE:

Consultation with children and young people is a strength of the service. Health assessment forms have been amended to include children's and young people's views, and consultation prior and participation in reviews was evident.

At a more individual level young people reported that "my social workers takes notice of my opinion", and "When I have an opinion, they listen to me".

Appropriate contact arrangements were made for children and young people with friends and family. Contact plans are drawn up in respect of looked after children, including a risk assessment to determine the level of supervision, if any, that may be necessary. A feedback sheet is completed which allows carers to comment on how contact has gone and the effect on the child.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.

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

EVIDENCE:

Independence skills are promoted by the direct payment to young people aged 16 plus of elements of the fostering allowance. Foster carers supported young people in developing skills for independence, not only in respect of the practical aspects of this transition, but also in “being helped to think about the future...thinking ahead about what to do” as one young person commented. About the process of moving on, one foster carer commented “so far moving on has been a positive experience with consideration and care planning for all concerned”.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

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

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25, 32

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. Staff and carers demonstrated their commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children and expressed confidence in the new restructuring arrangements. Record management and safeguarding mechanisms are in place, but there are gaps and irregularity in some of these key systems and processes.

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

EVIDENCE:

A clear Statement of Purpose is in place and is available to staff and carers, and there are many positive aspects to the service. Foster carers reported good communication and good working relationships with family placement officers and fostering support workers, although they would like social workers to return their phone calls and listen more to what they have to say about children in their care.

The Black and Minority Ethnic support worker was singled out for particular praise, as were several other individual fostering officers; "I have nothing but praise for the fostering service" commented one foster carer "they have helped us beyond the call of duty on occasion". Family placement officers were said to be "approachable and reliable" and "excellent at supporting me".

The response from children and young people who returned their questionnaires (51 at the time of writing this report) was also positive. There was evidence of good relationships between children and young people and their carers: "I feel safe and happy and secure and I love it where I'm living!" was one comment; another feels well cared for and "one of the family".

The Family Placement Service has been in the process of restructuring since the last inspection. Feedback from staff, carers and other stakeholders indicates that this restructuring is viewed as very positive: "It feels as though the service is moving forward at last" was one comment made to the inspector.

The service has appointed a Corporate Parenting Manager has been appointed to help draw together individuals from other stakeholding agencies – such as health and education – to improve working together arrangements and outcomes for children and young people. Foster carers reported the new out of hours duty service to be a great help. A Foster Carer Reference group has also recently been established, along with a support group for the children of foster carers.

The inspector found that good progress has been made in many areas of service delivery since the last inspection; there is a sense of a service in transition, dynamic and moving forward in many respects. However, there is still the need to embed some basic systems and processes, and develop others. For instance, every foster carer is reviewed annually and that all young people receive a health assessment. Another example is that consultation with children and young people is demonstrated to be good, but their views and those of their families need to be more apparent in any quality assurance process.

This outcome is assessed as adequate, therefore, as although this is clearly a service that is improving, the more robust management of the service that is aspired to has yet to translate into effective performance in all the outcomes required for children and young people.

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	1
9	3
15	3
30	1

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	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	2
22	3
23	X
24	3
25	3
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	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	15	Written health care records for each child placed must be maintained, in a format that children can access and understand. (Previous timescale 1 June 2005 and December 2005)	31/03/07
2.	FS8	34	Before making a placement, a Foster Placement Agreement must be completed that covers the matters specified in Schedule 6.	31/03/07
3.	FS30	24	Panel must be quorate at all times. Joint panels must have appropriate representation.	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	Health assessments must be provided for all children and young people
2	FS21	Annual reviews for every carer should be brought to panel

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