

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sheffield Local Authority Fostering

Floor 2, Castle Market Building Exchange Street
Sheffield
S1 2AH

Lead Inspector
Sue
Turner

7th 12th and 13th September 2005 09:00

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 Sheffield Local Authority Fostering

Address Floor 2, Castle Market Building

Exchange Street

Sheffield S1 2AH

Telephone number 0114 2735155

Fax number 0114 2734492

Email address Not known

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 Authority Fostering Service

No. of places registered

(if applicable)

Not applicable

Category(ies) of

registration, with number

of places

Not applicable

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None

Date of last inspection 23rd November 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.

SUMMARY

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

Prior to the inspection a number of questionnaires were sent out to placing officers, foster carers and foster children, giving them the opportunity to tell us about their own views of the service.

The inspection was conducted by two inspectors and took place over three days. One day was spent visiting foster children and their carers at home. The other two days were spent at the office base, where a number of records were checked including children's, carers and staff files. Interviews also took place with a number of supervising support workers, the service manager and foster carers.

The response to questionnaires, visits and interviews was pleasing and in all the total number of views assembled was: -

Children and Young People 16

Foster Carers 20

Fostering Services Staff 10

Placing Officers (children and young peoples social workers) 11

What the service does well:

Foster carers and foster children feel well supported by the fostering service. Several children and young people said that they felt they received more support from the services support worker than their own social worker. One young person said that their support worker ' had a heart of gold and deserved an award for all there hard work'.

Children and young people said the best thing about fostering was that they were 'part of a family' and those who were placed with relatives were pleased that they had not been 'placed with strangers'.

All children and young people commented that their foster carers helped them to stay healthy. Examples of their comments were 'they encourage me to eat five fruit and veg a day' and 'mum cooks healthy food and talks to me about exercise'.

The foster carers who attended training courses said that the training content and delivery was informative and useful.

All placing officers surveyed said that they considered that the children and young people placed were safe in their placement and would have no concerns placing other children with either the fostering service or the carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Children and young people surveyed stated that their views and opinions were sought on a regular basis by both the fostering service and their foster carers. They said they were asked their views on such things as 'do you like living here? Do you feel happy? Do you feel safe?

The children's guide to the fostering service was available in a range of formats and different languages.

The majority of foster carers said that they were provided with full information about children and young people at the start of the placement. When full information wasn't provided it was mainly because the child had been placed in an emergency situation and the service did not have detailed information to pass onto the carers.

Children's individual files included fully completed risk assessments. A record of all contact visits was kept on the child's individual file, allowing for the appropriateness of contact visits to be monitored and evaluated.

The guide 'Preparing Young People for Independence' had been distributed to carers and carers spoken to were familiar with this guide.

What they could do better:

Written health care records for each child placed have to be maintained and should be in a format that children and young people can access and understand.

Staff files must include all of the required information.

Further training /information should be given to carers focusing on the significance of what should be recorded in the diary and the reasons why. Following contact visits, foster carers should be given feedback to ensure they can continue to provide appropriate care for the child/young person.

Regular visits from field social worker should be made to all foster children and young people.

Closer working links should be made between the leaving care service and foster carers to bring about improvements for young people who are moving to independent living.

Children over the age of fourteen should be assessed in relation to their need for a Pathway Plan.

Positive communication systems between 'teams' within the service should be promoted and facilitated.

All interested parties should be fully consulted and made aware of the changes made to the service and how these will affect them.

Foster carer reviews should take place at intervals of not more than a year. All foster carers should attend training as specified in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

There must be a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced team managers working for the service.

The foster carers agreement should include all details as listed in Schedule 5 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Foster carers should receive training on the records that they are required to maintain and this should include the use of photograph albums and life story work.

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.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12.

The health and development of the children and young people was promoted by the fostering service.

A written health care record was not maintained in a format that could be understood, accessed and 'moved' with the child/young person.

EVIDENCE:

Carers spoken to said that the fostering service provided them with as much health information as possible at the start of the placement. Health information received for each child varied depending upon the co- operation of the child's birth parents and other professionals. The importance of obtaining health information was seen as a priority in ensuring that the foster carers were able to meet the child's physical, emotional and social needs and development. All children and young people spoken to said that their foster carer supported them to attend appointments with such people as the dentist and optician. Children and young people said their foster carers were constantly offering them advice about 'eating healthy foods', 'brushing teeth', 'exercise' and personal hygiene'.

Foster carer training was available which ensured that carers were giving accurate advice and guidance to their foster children.

Two young people spoken to said that they did not have a written health record, which detailed any health issues and any medical appointments, they had attended. They said it would help if this was 'all together' and in a format that they could take with them should they 'move elsewhere'.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3 6 8 9 15 and 30.

Required documentation was not retained on all staff files.

Suitable foster carers were being recruited by the fostering service.

Matching children and young people with an appropriate family was considered and facilitated where possible.

Training and information that highlights the significance of records made in the carer's diary should be made available.

EVIDENCE:

The manager's personnel file was checked. It contained all of the required information, which assisted in ensuring the safety and welfare of all those using and working within the service. The files of five supervising support workers were also checked. Not all required information had been ascertained and placed on the files.

Information received from the children and young people interviewed and consulted with confirmed that the service recruited carers who provided a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Comments from young people included, 'our carers talk to us about how to stay safe and look after ourselves'

'I'm encouraged to eat healthily and wash myself'.

All children and young people consulted said they felt safe at their placement. Staff spoken to confirmed that assessments were carefully considered when matching a child with a family and the child's assessed needs in relation to language, religion, race, culture, ethnic origin and any other special individual needs were identified. Foster placement agreements seen by the inspectors confirmed that some of the specific aspects of matching had been taken into consideration when children had been placed.

The service had a policy on safe caring, bullying and risk assessment, which was included in the foster carers policy and guidance file. The service had become involved with other agencies to agree and work together with a new protocol regarding 'Running away from Care and Home' its aim being to safeguard children.

The carer's handbook covered the issues of difficult/ challenging behaviour and corporal punishment.

Three newly recruited carers interviewed said that they used their diaries to record any 'negative' behaviours or issues. Positive behaviours and responses were, on the whole not recorded. Carers spoken to had not received any training on the records they were required to maintain of any significant events.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7, 13 and 31.

Children and young people are provided with foster care services, which value diversity and promote equality. More emphasis should be placed on the value of training in these areas.

The service has identified 'areas of concern' within the educational achievements of Looked After Children and has put in place an action plan. The service is meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

EVIDENCE:

The service promoted equality and diversity by the monitoring of matching children to carers, by planned carer recruitment strategies and by offering ongoing training to staff and carers. Carers spoken to were able to recognise and address young peoples diverse needs. A number of carers spoken to had not attended the training offered, which would enhance their skills to further assist young people to deal with issues of discrimination, sexuality, disability and feeling of self-worth. See subsequent requirement at Standard 23. Children's questionnaires confirmed that young people were given practical and financial assistance to pursue activities and hobbies. Examples of young peoples comments are:

'mum buys me craft materials and we do art work together' 'my foster carer comes to all the plays and shows that I do'. As of August 2005 the service has re-organised and will work jointly with the Local Education Authority. It is hoped that the new directorate will create a climate that allows further focus on raising the educational achievement of Looked After Children. The fostering service has taken over the running and full funding of the annual 'Bag a Book' day which focuses on literacy but is an event that encourages the participation of foster carers and Looked After Children alike.

Children and young people consulted said that their carers supported them by: 'mum goes to lots of meetings at school about me and helps me with my homework'

'I was only with this carer for a couple of weeks, but we went to my new school open night together'.

The service provided short-term/respite care placements for children with disabilities.

Carers who regularly offered short-term care to children and young people said that they were well supported by their supervising social workers and were visited more often than at the agreed interval of once a month. They each communicated regularly with the children's parents to ensure continuity with some of the routines.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10 and 11.

Children and young people are supported to maintain family contact. Feedback to carers following contact visits must be facilitated. The fostering service ensures that the opinions and views of children and young people are ascertained.

Everyone involved in the placing of young people would benefit from a 'disruption meeting' when a permanent fostering placement breaks down'

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service had written guidance for staff in their `Looked After Children Manual', regarding promoting contact with the child's family, relatives and friends.

Information from children's questionnaires and carer interviews confirmed that both were aware of contact arrangements. Any changes to this were discussed and agreed with the carers and young people. Any resources identified as being necessary to support contact between a child and their family were provided. Details of contact visits were fully recorded on the young peoples files seen.

Carers spoken to said that very often following a contact visit they were not provided with crucial information, for example, if the child had eaten that day. This was of particular concern to the foster parents, caring for babies and children with disabilities.

A significant number of young people, carers and supervising support workers raised concerns relating to visits from field social workers. Some young people were not visited on a regular basis, appointments were often cancelled with little notice and several young people did not have an allocated worker. One baby visited by the inspectors was ten weeks old and had not been allocated a social worker. One carer said that their foster child had had ten different social workers. Another young person consulted said:

'I have only seen my social worker once in this foster home and I've been here seven weeks'.

Ten young peoples questionnaires were received. Nine of these stated that the fostering service had asked them their opinions about how the fostering service could be made better and asked them their opinion of their foster carers. They also stated they were aware of how to raise any concerns or complaints.

Staff spoken to felt strongly that there was a need to have a 'break-down' meeting when a permanent fostering placement came to an end. They said that there was a need to see if lessons could be learnt from this, that would better safe guard other young people.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 14 and 29.

Foster carers provide support to young people preparing to move to independence. The leaving care service does not work hand in hand with foster carers to help develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult livina.

Carers receive clear information about the allowances and expenses payable. Birthday and Christmas money should be paid more promptly.

EVIDENCE:

Carers said that they had received a 'Preparation for Independence' guide from the fostering service. A number of young people spoken to said that their carers helped them to develop skills such as managing money, cooking and issues relating to independent living. The service has a separate Leaving Care Team, known as Number 92. Two young people spoken to said that their involvement with the leaving care team had not been helpful. One young person said that in one year they had had five different 'Number 92' workers, which had not allowed for a positive relationship to form. Two young people also said that they had been told that they would learn such things as cooking and shopping, however this hadn't happened. Two carers spoken to said when their foster children (who had been placed with them over five years) had become involved with Number 92, the staff at the scheme had not valued their opinions and had made decisions about their foster children without any consultation or discussion. Two young people spoken to said they were not aware of and had not contributed to the implementation a 'Pathway Plan'. The service had written policies, which detailed the fostering allowances currently payable to all carers.

Foster carers allowances paid were clearly documented and all carers interviewed said that they were clear about their allowances and any agreed expenses. Carers spoken to said that the payments made for birthdays and Christmas were paid approximately two weeks in advance which did not give them enough time, and they therefore needed to pay out for presents from their own money.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares 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 standard(s) 1,2,4,5,17,19,20,21,22,23 and 24.

The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out what services are provided for children who are placed by the fostering service.

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service have the necessary skills to deliver good quality childcare.

Foster carers reviews do not take place at the required minimum intervals. The service offers a range of good quality training, however it is unsatisfactory that many foster carers 'chose' not to participate in the training programme.

Foster carers were well supported however, for some staff the support offered from their line manager was not sufficient.

Case records kept for young people were in the main up to date and well maintained.

EVIDENCE:

Staff spoken to were aware of the Statement of Purpose's existence and content. The Statement of Purpose had been recently reviewed following which the service was to undergo a re structuring to fully meet the services aims and objectives. The re organisation of the service had required changes to be made to the staffs roles and responsibilities. Some staff spoken to said that communication between different teams within the service had deteriorated, consequently affecting the quality of service offered to the foster carers and young people. Foster carers and young people spoken to were unaware of any proposed changes to the service.

Since the last inspection a new manager had been recruited who had the appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively run the service.

The carer's reviews were the responsibility of the reviewing team. For a substantial number of carers these reviews had not taken place yearly. Staff spoken to said that the inflexibility of the reviewing officers hindered this process being carried out as required.

The inspectors spoke to ten supervising support workers and nine foster carers, the inspectors found staff to be professional and carers demonstrated the skills and awareness necessary to carry out their role.

All supervising support workers and carers spoken to said that there was a good range and quality of training courses available. Established carers said that their supervising social workers had spoken to them about attending courses but they did not see this as obligatory.

Ten supervising social workers were spoken to. The amount of management support they said they received varied. Some said they had good support from their line manager whilst others felt that they did not have a line manager who could give them the guidance and support they required. As part of re organisation the service was in the process of interviewing for several new team managers.

All foster carers consulted said that there was a good system of communication between themselves and the fostering service.

A copy the foster carer agreement was seen on carer's files. These did not contain all of the required information as referred to in Schedule 5 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Young peoples case records seen were up to date and informative. See Standard 9 for issue relating to records kept by carers.

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.

(Commendable) 4 Standard Exceeded **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls) 2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) 1 Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

[&]quot;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			

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE		
CONTRIBUTION		
Standard No	Score	
10	2	
11	2	

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC		
WELLBEING		
Standard No	Score	
14	1	
29	2	

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

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.	12	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)	1 December 2005
2.	15	20	Staff files must include all of the information as specified in Regulation 20 Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations.	1 November 2005
3.	9	17	Further training /information must be given to carers focusing on the significance of what should be recorded in the diary and the reasons why. (Previous timescales 1 June 2005 and 1 December 2004)	1 November 2005
4.	10	17	Following contact visits, foster carers must be given feedback to ensure they can continue to provide appropriate care for the child.	1 November 2005
5.	10	19	All children in foster placements must receive regular visits from their field social worker.	1 November 2005
6.	14	16	The leaving care service must work more closely with foster carers to bring about improvements to the service offered to young people who are moving to independent living.	1 December 2005

7.	14	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	Each child over the age of fourteen must be assessed in relation to their need for a Pathway Plan, subject to their elegability and ability.	1 December 2005
8.	4	19	Positive communication systems between 'teams' within the service must be promoted and facilitated.	1 November 2005
9.	4	17	The service must ensure that all interested parties are fully consulted and aware of the changes made to the service and how these will affect them.	1 December 2005
10.	4	29	Foster carer reviews must take place at intervals of not more than a year. (Previous timescale 1 June 2005)	1 November 2005
11.	23	17	All carers must attend training as specified in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. Records of training must be maintained and used as part of the annual appraisal/review. (Previous timescale 1 June 2005).	1 December 2005
12.	17 and 20	19	The fostering service must ensure that there is a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced team managers working for the service.	1 December 2005
13.	22	28	The foster carers agreement for all carers must include all details as listed in Schedule 5 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. (Previous timescale 1 June 2005 and 1 May 2004).	1 November 2005
14.	9 and 24	17	All carers must be trained on the records that they are required to maintain and this should include the use of photograph albums and life story work. (Previous timescale 1 June 2005 and 1 December 2004).	1 December 2005

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.	11	Disruption meetings should be held when there is a placement break down in a permanent fostering placement.
2.	29	Birthday and Christmas allowences should be paid well in advance of the money being required.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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