



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Oldham MBC Fostering Services

**Oldham M.B.C. Social services
Civic Centre, West Street
Oldham
OL1 1UW**

Lead Inspector
Helen Humphreys

Announced Inspection
11th December 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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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	Oldham MBC Fostering Services
Address	Oldham M.B.C. Social services Civic Centre, West Street Oldham OL1 1UW
Telephone number	0161 474 4637
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Oldham M.B.C. Children, Young People & Families
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Steve Slater
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 23rd January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service currently has 128 approved fostering households and this includes 44 'Friends and Family' carers and 19 carers who are part of the Family Link Services offering short breaks to families with children with disabilities.

The service has temporary carers offering a placement in an emergency and medium to long-term care. The service has permanent carers who provide long term care as an alternative to adoption. The Friends and Family carers provide care to children who are known to them and this may be on a short or long-term basis. Oldham SSD were exploring the use of 'special guardianship' at the time of the inspection.

The service has some respite carers who provide short breaks to families and other carers with caring responsibilities.

Last year Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Fostering Service introduced a 'payment for skills' scheme, which will provide carers with additional money in accordance with their assessed abilities and in addition to the fostering allowance.

The service is managed by an appointed manager and two senior practitioners, and is located within the Looked After Service managed by a head of service. The fostering service is managed separately to the adoption service. A service manager for fostering and adoption had been appointed a few weeks prior to this inspection.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over four days and followed an inspection of the private fostering arrangements. Various interviews took place with staff which covered both inspections. Due to the Christmas holiday, visits to carers took place in early January 2007.

The inspection included interviews with: the Assistant Director, the service manager for fostering and adoption, the manager of the fostering service, the nurse appointed for Looked After Children (LAC nurse), the Children's Rights Officer, the manager of the education support service for Looked After Children, the newly appointed placements manager, the contract officer, the Independent Reviewing Officers and the member of staff responsible for the short break service. A case tracking exercise was undertaken with five young people, two who are placed with the short break service, two who are aged over 16 and placed with family and friends carers and one placed with an independent fostering agency. Social workers responsible for each young person were interviewed, their files were read and the homes of four of the carers were visited and discussions were held with the carers and young people. Various records and documents were examined, including panel minutes from the last three fostering panels. The inspector observed the meeting of the placements panel.

Questionnaires were sent to a random selection of one third of carers and young people aged over 8, however there has been a limited response, possibly due to the Christmas holidays.

The manager completed an Annual Assessment Quality Assurance document and a 'dataset', which provided statistical information.

This inspection should have been undertaken with an inspection of the adoption service, however due to illness this did not take place. Oldham piloted the new methodology for fostering inspections in January 2006, therefore this inspection concentrated on matters not covered in the last inspection.

What the service does well:

This has become a well-respected fostering service, which was commented on positively by a range of professionals employed by Oldham and carers and young people. Most carers were positive about the service and the support they receive from the fostering staff. 'Family placement are very supportive, training offered on a regular basis' and 'They are always available if we need help and see us at regular intervals'.

The carers are well supported by named social workers who visit regularly, provide supervision, training and support groups. Most carers said that they could easily contact their named social worker.

The young people seen on this occasion and the last were pleased with their living arrangements and, in particular, the two young women aged over 16 were doing extremely well and their futures looked promising.

The service is well supported by a LAC Nurse who has worked extensively over the last few years to improve the health outcomes for young people, including the provision of training and attendance at health care assessments by young people. She is also a member of the Fostering Panel. Young people continue to have timely access to the service provided by the Community Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The LAC nurse was known to most carers.

The carers and young people receive a good service from the teachers employed by the service to support young people in education and this service continues to develop with new projects being developed each year. One carer wrote, 'Helen Murphy's team is excellent' and 'they are prepared to go to school and resolve any problems that arise'.

The service is well managed by a competent manager who is supported by a newly appointed service manager and two senior practitioners. The staff team are qualified and experienced and well able to carry out the task.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has continued in steady improvement in all aspects of the service over the last 12 months. This was commented on by carers and other professionals, including the Independent Reviewing Officers, who said that they could see the progress made by young people from their reviews and that this was mainly due to the practice of the carers, as they are now receiving better support and training opportunities.

Most of the requirements made at the last inspection have been met completely or there is related ongoing work in hand.

The carers have been offered new training opportunities, in particular this year, training on new courses, on healthy lifestyles, supporting young people in education and on developing independent living skills. The take-up of this course is encouraging.

The team have continued to recruit carers and this year have recruited and assessed 30 new carers, 11 of whom are friends and family carers. This has impacted on the team's ability to match more appropriately and provide some greater choice of placements to young people and social workers.

The Short Break Service has moved to be managed directly by the fostering team manager and the staff member involved sees this positively and an opportunity to be supported by a larger team, but still keeping contact with the disability service. This service has recruited more carers in the last year and is now providing a service to more children. The Short Break Service was involved in a scheme to pilot materials to encourage the recruitment of carers who are black or from a minority ethnic heritage.

The team have offered some consultation opportunities to young people this year, through involvement with the Corporate Parenting Strategy and a series of outdoor activity days and a weekend away at an outdoor centre. Young people who had been involved in these activities said that they had been enjoyable.

The Short Break Service and the fostering team have recruited carers from the various communities in Oldham and have taken part in the Inter Faith Forum activities during the year.

The new payment scheme has now been implemented for almost a year and is beginning to be embedded into the systems and there are some early indications that it is having an impact on recruitment and retention, and the uptake of training by carers and, in particular, the NVQ programme.

The service has appointed a service manager for Fostering and Adoption and the post holder had been in post for a few weeks prior to the inspection. This will provide additional support and strategic direction for the service.

The team has appointed two more staff and now have no vacancies, although one staff member remains on long-term sick leave. The staff have continued to access training opportunities and the manager has almost completed her NVQ level 4 in management.

The manager has introduced new monitoring systems and produced a report to outline the activity of the team in the previous six months and where action had been taken.

Oldham has created a new team called 'The Life Chances Team' which is chaired by the Head of Service and incorporates a number of professionals involved with Looked After children. The intention is to track more closely and monitor the young people who are looked after and ensure that they have access to all the service they need to improve overall their life chances.

What they could do better:

The service manager and manager of the team are aware of the ongoing work required for the continued development of the service.

The Short Break Service continues to provide a good service to carers and families. However, it is now appropriate to review this in conjunction with the rest of the service so that it can look to make further developments in light of other changes within Oldham and the demands of the service.

There are a number of participation and consultation events happening across the Looked After Service. From accounts, all events appear to have been successful and enjoyable for young people. Some young people said on this occasion and others that they were continually being asked to go to events. It would be appropriate to try to co-ordinate each event as part of an overall strategy so that there is no duplication, there is a clear purpose for each event and young people do not start to feel overloaded or over-exposed.

The Children's Rights Service, for various reasons, has little impact on fostered children and young people on this occasion and on previous inspections either did not know about the service or had not needed to engage. It would be appropriate to undertake some work so that this service is more widely known to fostered children and that they know that they can use this service for any complaints or concerns that they have.

The fostering service should continue to try and encourage more understanding amongst carers on how to develop skills and knowledge for older young people.

The service manager was aware of the need to develop clear development plans covering all aspects of the service, including recruitment, assessments training and support of carers, development of the staff and the Panel, to include target setting, monitoring of the service and a revision of policies and procedures to ensure that there is consistency within the team.

Although there was some improvement, some of the files of the children placed, which are kept by the placing social workers, were disorganised and it was not clear on at least two files, how or why the young people concerned had been placed with the particular carer. Carers and young people reported on inconsistent practice from placing social workers and on the frequency of a change of social worker. This remains a challenge for Oldham.

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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Scoring of Outcomes

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good because the service promotes the good health and welfare of the young people placed and is seeking continually to make improvements. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Young people said that their carers kept them healthy, gave them good food to eat and encouraged them to take exercise.

Carers have access to training on health related topics and, in particular, a newly devised course, called healthy care. This is delivered in conjunction with the LAC Nurse and staff from the fostering team.

The LAC Nurse has undertaken training with the school nurses and health visitors who assist in undertaking the health care assessments. Despite this work, the number of young people undertaking their health care assessment remains static, although it is mainly older young people who are not having their assessments.

The LAC Nurse and members of fostering team have other ongoing developments in hand, including an audit checklist tool to be used when a young person is initially accommodated to track their health care information and monitor progress.

All Looked After Children can now access a dentist and their visits are monitored.

More carers had health care information required on young people than on previous occasions, although this still remains a challenge.

The service enjoys a good working relationship with Reflections (counselling service) and CAMHS and all young people who have been referred to the service have been seen within a short timescale. Fostered children have access to a range of other health care professionals and services.

Children who were seen on this and other occasions looked well.

The manager is aware of other developments, which are required to improve further the 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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is good because there are effective systems in place to keep children safe.

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

EVIDENCE:

A manager who has the necessary skills, experience and qualification manages the service. She is supported by a newly appointed service manager and a Head of Service for all Looked After children.

The carers who were met on this and previous occasions were providing a good service and young people were generally making good progress. Carers were aware of health and safety issues and all had safe caring policies.

The overall matching of young people has continued to steadily improve over the last few years, which has further improved this year, with an increase in the number of carers available.

A newly appointed placements manager monitors placements so that the records are kept up to date. Placements made in the last two years are supported by placement agreement and matching form, which set out why a particular placement had been made. All requests for placements are taken to the placements panel where cases are discussed and options considered. This ensures that, wherever possible, matching is robust and clear.

Decisions regarding long-term care are taken at the placements panel and the adoption and permanency panel.

Oldham has a clear commissioning strategy, which is led by the contracts officer who has worked with independent fostering agencies to ensure that they are obtaining quality placements which give value for money.

Carers are offered training in child protection, although take-up of this is limited.

No young people said they were being bullied. All young people who communicated with the inspector on this and a previous occasion said that they felt safe in the placement.

The files for the newly appointed staff indicated that appropriate procedures had been followed and all required documentation was in place.

The Panel is chaired by the head of service and operates efficiently. The panel minutes indicate that it undertakes a range of business and makes careful recommendations. The agency decision-maker takes an active part in the decision making and will ask for additional information if required. The agency decision-maker does not always ratify the recommendations of the Panel. The Panel has welcomed some new members over the last 12 months.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good because young people are supported to do well in school, and there is continued development to promote equality and diversity, including the short break service which provides an appropriate service to children with disabilities and their families.

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

EVIDENCE:

Both the short break service and fostering service have recruited carers from specific communities in Oldham and are further developing services to improve the overall number recruited which will in turn impact favourably on matching.

The cultural and religious needs of children placed are discussed during the supervision of carers.

Carers have access to the 'Total Respect' course, which includes training on diversity, and other course on anti-discriminatory practice, identity and self-esteem.

Information provided by the fostering service indicates that, generally, there is an improvement in the overall education experience for fostered children. No fostered child was without education provision and almost 90% had a Personal Education Plan. 78% of young people aged 16 who were in foster care achieved at least one GCSE, with one achieving at least five.

The education team who support looked after children in education meet with carers and have provided training and support. Members of the team were known to carers. This team have recruited two learning mentors who work directly with 30 fostered children to provide additional support.

The Short Break Service is now located within the fostering team but retains its links with the disability service. The service has developed over the last 12 months and now has more carers (17) giving a service to more young people (18) than last year.

The carers have access to specific training relating to the specific needs of the young people placed and the access to the training provided for 'mainstream' carers. However, access to training by short break carers remains quite low, due in part to the fact that a lot of the carers are very experienced.

It is generally agreed that with the development of the service at 45 Netherhey Street and other changes within the disability service, that it is appropriate to review this service to ensure that it has the resources to meet demand and that it is using the resources it has to best effect.

Carers who were seen from the short break service were providing a good service and said that they felt very supported by the member of staff. One carer said 'we have no problems - all is going well'.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good, the carers are supported to promote contact and the Authority has in place a number of consultation projects.

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

EVIDENCE:

The arrangements for promoting contact were generally recorded and young people said on this occasion and at the last that they were satisfied with the contact arrangements. Contact issues are taken into account during the matching process and carers receive training in their initial training about managing contact and how important it is to maintain this.

On this occasion and all previous young people knew what to do if they wanted to make a complaint or raise a concern, although few cited the Children's Right's Officer, Complaint's Officer or CSCI.

Young people who were seen on this occasion had taken part in their statutory reviews and had coped with them and some had completed the consultation documents.

The Independent Reviewing officers outlined the steps they take to ensure that, wherever possible, young people are contributing to their reviews but that sometimes this is not possible. There was some agreement that it might be timely to review the documents to take into account changing legislation and practice and this should be considered. Statistics indicate that the number of young people taking part in their reviews was not improving.

The Children's Right's Officer confirmed that she has little contact with the vast majority of children who are fostered and rarely takes complaints from them and has struggled to find an appropriate or effective way to make contact with them.

Oldham has in hand at present a number of projects involving looked after children and some said that they had enjoyed the activities. However, others said that they were constantly being asked to take part in events. It would be appropriate for the fostering service to develop consultation projects or events, which are part of their development and have distinct purposes and do not duplicate other pieces of work.

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 adequate, although some individual children are making good progress; sustained developments are required to embed this into practice.

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

EVIDENCE:

The two young people seen who were aged over 16 were making good progress and their futures looked promising. Assurances had been given that they would be supported financially if they wanted to go on to higher education.

Both young women and one carer did not feel that the Pathway Planning process had contributed to their overall progress and they had not really needed a lot of support from the After Care Service. Pathway plans are reviewed at statutory reviews.

Training is offered to carers on developing independent living skills but the take-up has been very limited from foster carers.

Staff from the After Care team said that, in their opinion, a number of carers needed to know more about this subject. They reported that they have good relationships with the staff from the fostering team.

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):

17, 21, 24, 32

Quality in this outcome area is good because this service is well managed by an experienced and qualified manager who is supported by a staff team with a range of skills and strengths who are committed to developing the service.

EVIDENCE:

The staff team has grown in size since last year and currently has no vacancies. The staff are qualified and experienced and many have taken up opportunities to pursue additional qualifications and training opportunities. They presented on this occasion and on the last as keen, loyal and committed to the service and supporting carers to provide good quality care.

Most carers were complementary about the staff and other professionals commented on the overall progress the team has made in the last two years.

Carers said that they were well supported by staff, by visits and calls and all said that calls are returned quickly and staff were helpful. Some carers had not been visited in recent months due to the long-term sickness of one member of staff but that this had been resolved now by the appointment of a new worker.

Carers are offered a range of training opportunities but generally take-up remains low, although some carers access more training than others.

The team has successfully recruited 30 carers in the last 12 months and should meet their own target for recruitment. The time it takes to assess new carers is improving and current assessments read on this occasion were satisfactory.

The manager is aware of the need to refine the recruitment strategy to meet specific need.

The case records for young people varied with some good practice noted. There has been some improvement from last time, however it was not clear on two files why the young people had been accommodated or placed where they were. Some carers and young people commented negatively on the service they receive from the placing social worker.

The friends and family carers receive the same level of service as other carers and those seen said that they were well supported. Some carers had accessed training and other social events.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

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

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	X

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

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
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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	FS31	OMBC should review the Short Break Service.
2	FS11	OMBC should develop the consultation events into an overall strategy.
3	FS11	OMBC should ensure that the work of the Children’s Right’s Officer is more widely known to carers.
4	FS14	OMBC should continue to develop the skills of carers in developing independent living skills.
5	FS4	OMBC should strengthen their development plans so that they are robust and seek to continually develop the service.
6	FS24	OMBC should ensure that the case files for young people placed are comprehensive, ordered and clearly state why young people have been accommodated.

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