



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Sandwell Local Authority Fostering Service

**Crystal House
1 - 7 Crystal Drive
Sandwell Business Park
Smethwick B66 1QG**

Lead Inspector
Linda
Elsaleh

Announced
12th - 16th & 23rd September 2005

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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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	Sandwell Social Inclusion & Health
Address	LA Sandwell Authority Fostering Service, Crystal House, 1 - 7 Crystal Drive, Sandwell Business Park, Smethwick, West Midlands, B66 1QG
Telephone number	0845 352 8609
Fax number	0845 352 8626
Email address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Sandwell Social Inclusion & Health
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Norma Broadstock
Type of registration	N/A
No. of places registered (if applicable)	N/A
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	N/A

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

N/A

Date of last inspection 11th October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Sandwell Fostering Service is based in Smethwick and has a large number of experienced and highly committed foster carers. It provides foster care placements with approved foster carers for children and young people who are looked after by Sandwell Local Authority. It supports foster carers and placements of children/young people through the provision of a supervising social worker and can call upon specialist staff and services within social services, health and education fields, as appropriate. All foster carers have completed the Fostering Network 'Choosing to Foster', and more recently the 'Skills for Fostering' programme.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was carried out over six days by three inspectors. Its main focus was to assess the fostering service's progress in meeting the requirements made at previous inspections. This report is based on the comments made by staff, foster carers, children/young people and other relevant professionals and examination of relevant documentation and records.

The local authority's modernisation programme for the service is still in the implementation stage. The re-structuring of the service's management team is part of this programme. The inspectors were informed the re-structuring will take place in the very near future.

What the service does well:

The fostering service's premises provide staff with a good working environment. They have access to appropriate facilities and equipment. It has appropriate procedures for the recruitment and selection of qualified and experienced staff. There is an established staff team indicating a strong commitment by individuals in providing a good level of service to foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Statement of Purpose has been improved and produced a user-friendly Children's Guide. Some of the children/young people have been involved in its content and presentation. Systems for enabling children/young people to express their views about the service have also improved.

The fostering service has improved the service it provides to relative carers. This includes processes for support and assessments. Allowances for foster carers have been improved and the Foster Carer's Agreements and Foster Placement Agreements have been revised.

An officer has been identified from Sandwell's training section to develop appropriate training programmes for foster carers. It has also appointed an independent reviewing officer. The service is continuing to develop its relationship with the Looked After Children healthcare professionals.

What they could do better:

The service needs to ensure all relevant policies, procedures and guidance are available to staff. The information provided in the Fostering Handbook requires updating. A planned approach to training and development of fostering social workers and foster carers needs to be produced.

Foster carers must be provided with all relevant details of children/young people's care needs and comprehensive records kept of how the care is to be provided and of any specific arrangements and agreements made. A consistent approach needs to be implemented for maintaining files and record keeping.

A robust system for the regular monitoring and review of all aspects of the service needs to be identified and implemented to ensure the aims of the service is being met in relation to its Statement of Purpose.

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

EVIDENCE:

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

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

It was reported at the previous inspection that a Specialist Nurse and Consultant had been identified to undertake initial healthcare assessments. Discussions with the Specialist Nurse confirmed initial health care assessments are being arranged.

The fostering service stated children/young people's healthcare details are provided to foster carers as part of the matching process. However, foster carers reported some delay in receiving this information.

Foster carers expressed concern about the different responses they received from the fostering service about arrangements for consent for medical treatment. Sandwell's Children's Services Procedures Manual and Fostering Handbook provides general guidance. These need to be reviewed to ensure consistent working practices are followed. Examination of records found that the medical consent section was not been completed in all cases.

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 & 30

The Fostering Service's recruitment and selection procedure ensures children/young people are cared for by suitable staff and fosters carers. However, written guidance with regards to all aspects of children/young people's welfare and safety is not available and regular training is not provided. A systematic approach needs to be taken to monitoring records and reports.

EVIDENCE:

Records examined confirm appropriate procedures are followed for the appointment of staff and approval of foster carers.

The foster placement agreement has been revised. Fostering social workers gave detailed descriptions of the process undertaken by them to match children/young people with suitable foster carers. The effectiveness of this process evidenced in some of the records. The majority of foster carers reported they were satisfied with this process. However, some placements made with foster carers are inconsistent with their terms of approval and exemptions that have been agreed are often unsigned and/or have not reviewed by the specified date.

The Foster Care Agreement states that transport costs for children/young people are included in the allowances made to the foster carers. The discussions held found various interpretations on the provision of transport. The fostering service needs to address this issue with foster carers and any other relevant people.

Foster carers' homes are well maintained, decorated and furnished to a good standard. Some bedrooms have shared occupancy. Records are not available of agreements for such arrangements in all cases. The Fostering Handbook provides foster carers with information on home safety and areas of responsibility. The report produced by Sandwell's Training Section states 12 foster carers attended Health & Safety training in April 2004. No current information about this training was provided. Regular health & safety assessments are carried out as part of the approval and review of foster carers. A copy of the completed Health & Safety Checklist is available on the files. However, there is no written guidance for carrying out these assessments and formal training is not provided.

Child protection issues are covered in the 'Skills for Fostering' training and information is available in the Fostering Handbook. Since the last inspection the Local Authority's Child Protection Procedures have been revised. However, fostering social workers and approved foster carers have not received training updates. Written policies on safe caring, counter-bullying and whistle-blowing are not available. Some of the records held of child protection issues are incomplete. The service must ensure detailed information is kept of all child protection investigations and their outcomes. This is an outstanding requirement from the last inspection.

Acceptable measures of control are detailed in the Fostering Handbook with additional information and guidance on managing inappropriate behaviour. Where issues of behaviour management have been raised with individual foster carers, appropriate discussions have taken place and, where applicable, training needs have been identified. Procedures for reporting children/young people who are missing/absent from the home without permission have been reviewed. Foster carers demonstrated good awareness of these procedures.

The Fostering Panel's Guidance was not available. Fostering Panel members are provided with the agenda and information for the meetings in advance. Examination of the records and observations made during a panel meeting demonstrated panel members are thorough in their deliberations. They frequently identify issues that should be detailed more fully in the reports. Panel members defer making decisions if they consider the information provided is insufficient.

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 & 31

Foster carers encourage children/young people to achieve their educational potential and are supported in this task by the fostering social workers. However, they need to be provided with accurate information about consent arrangements for school trips and clear guidance about overnight stays.

The fostering service does not provide sufficient information about its support for trans-racial placements to ensure the needs of the children/young people are being appropriately met.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has some trans-racial placements. General information on valuing diversity and caring for children/young people from different cultures and religions is available in the Fostering Handbook. A written copy of the 'Same Race' Policy, referred to by staff, is not available. There is limited information on how the foster carers will be supported in providing care that respects and preserves the child/young person's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.

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

section for recording details of these arrangements. The service must ensure this section is completed. Confusion was also expressed about giving consent for children/young people to stay overnight with friends.

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 & 11

The fostering service encourages children/young people to maintain relationships with their family and other significant people. It has made good progress in developing systems for consulting with children/young people. The children/young people's views must be given due consideration through effective evaluation of the information provided.

EVIDENCE:

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

Children/young people stated they had received a copy of the Children's Guide and how to make a complaint. Records kept of complaints examined varied in content. A systematic approach to monitoring and reviewing complaints is not being carried out. These are outstanding requirements from the last inspection. The children/young people confirmed that they are consulted about their individual care and the service.

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 & 29

The foster carers provide support to young people to enable them to prepare for adulthood. However, the information provided to them by the fostering service is dated and a planned approach to training is not provided.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers spoke to the inspectors about how they prepare children/young people for leaving care. The information in the Fostering Handbook has not been revised following the development of the local authority's 16+ Policy and 'Pathway Plans'. Sandwell's Training Department report states 17 foster carers attended 'Pathway Plan' training during the last 12 months. The inspectors are unable to identify whether foster carers' attendance on the course was part of their identified training and development needs.

The service has completed a review of the fostering allowances and expenses. Foster carers expressed satisfaction with the outcome of this review and satisfactory records are kept of payments made to them.

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

The transfer of the service to more suitable premises has improved the working environment for all staff. Enquiries about the service are responded to in an efficient manner. Information about the fostering service is available in the Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide.

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

EVIDENCE:

Since the last inspection the fostering service has transferred to more suitable premises. This has greatly improved the working environment for all staff. There are suitable administrative systems in place and access to computerised data has been improved.

The Statement of Purpose is available on request and is due to be reviewed. A revised document will be produced once the re-structuring programme for the service has been completed. The Children's Guide has been produced and circulated. It is in a format that is suitable for the majority of the children/young people. The manager stated that other formats are being considered.

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

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

The Foster Care Agreement and the Foster Placement Agreement have been revised. These are in the early stages of implementation and will need to be monitored closely. The Fostering Handbook needs revising to reflect the changes that have been made to policies, procedures and guidance. A suitable content/index list is needed to enable the reader to access information more easily.

The children/young people's files are disorganised and incomplete. Various methods of recording information is being used and mixed entries of a child/young person's given and preferred names caused confusion for the reader. A written policy on case recording needs to be produced, training provided to staff and the structure and content of the files need to be regularly monitored. Formal systems are not being carried out on a regular basis for ensuring service is fulfilling its duties to the children/young people in its care.

Staff confirmed they receive regular supervision. Minutes of staff meetings are available. Foster carers also receive regular supervision. Records kept of foster carers' supervision sessions vary in content. 'Out of hours' support is not provided by the service, but is being considered. In the meantime, when necessary, foster carers contact Sandwell's Emergency Duty Team for advice.

The inspectors were informed induction programmes are provided for newly appointed staff. However, the programme was not made available. Staff are responsible for booking their own training courses from Sandwell's training diary. Staff reported that courses are often over subscribed or cancelled. In order to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments a more planned approach must be taken towards individual and team training. This is an outstanding requirement from previous inspections.

There are no planned, individual or group, training programmes for approved foster carers. Individual training records are not kept up to date. Foster carers stated they also apply for courses through Sandwell's training diary and they reported the same experiences of over-subscribed and cancelled courses. A training officer has been identified to produce appropriate training programmes for foster carers in the future.

The fostering social workers and children/young people's social workers report good levels of communication. However, there is little evidence to support these comments on the records. Arrangements for foster carers' reviews have been revised and an independent reviewing officer appointed.

Examination of assessment and review reports presented to the fostering panel show a need for a monitoring system to be implemented with regards to the quality of the information provided in order to reduce the number of deferred decisions being made by the panel.

There is no evidence to show that clear procedures are available for the monitoring of the service's performance. Records seen were generally incomplete. Therefore, the quality of the information maintained is insufficient to enable an effective review to be carried out. The maintaining of satisfactory monitoring records and carrying out of regular reviews on the service are outstanding requirements from the last inspection.

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	2
8	3
9	1
15	3
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	1
13	2
31	X

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	1

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	3

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

NO

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.	12	17, 34	The fostering service must ensure arrangements for consent to medical treatment are included in each children/young people's Foster Placement Agreement.	3 rd February 2006
2.	6	21	Fostering social workers must receive appropriate health & safety training. (Previous date for compliance 31 st January 2005)	3 rd February 2006
3.	6	28	The fostering service must ensure the terms of approval for each foster carer are kept up to date.	3 rd February 2006
4.	9	21, 28	Fostering social workers & foster carers must receive update training in Child Protection. Policies for safe caring, countering bullying & whistle-blowing must be produced.	3 rd February 2006
5.	30, 16	27, 42	The fostering service must implement a system for monitoring the information & quality of its reports.	3 rd February 2006
6.	7	17	The fostering service must keep detailed information of the support to be provided for each trans-racial placement	3 rd February 2006
7.	13	34	The fostering service must ensure appropriate details are	3 rd February

			included in Foster Placement Agreements for obtaining/giving consent for a child/young person to participate in school trips and stay overnight with friends.	2006
8.	11	18	The fostering service must keep appropriate records of complaints and implement a monitoring & reviewing system. (Previous date for compliance 10 th December 2004)	3 rd February 2006
9.	14	17	The fostering service must review the information it provides to foster carers on preparing young people for adulthood.	3 rd February 2006
10.	20, 12	42	The fostering service must ensure policies, procedures & guidances are available for staff.	3 rd February 2006
11.	21	17	The fostering service must review guidance & information provided in the Fostering Handbook.	3 rd February 2006
12.	24	22, 30, 34	The fostering service must implement appropriate systems for compiling & maintaining case files.	3 rd February 2006
13.	19, 6, 9, 24	21	The fostering service must provide planned training & development programmes for staff. (Previous date for compliance 31 st January 2005)	3 rd February 2006
14.	23, 12	17	Foster carers must be provided with training programmes. Accurate records must be kept training received by each carer. (Previous date for compliance 31 st January 2005)	3 rd February 2006
15.	4	42, 43	The fostering service must regularly monitor & review its service. (Previous date for compliance 10 th December 2005)	3 rd February 2006
16.				

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.		
2.		

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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