



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Stockport MBC Fostering Services

**Stockport Social Services
Ponsonby House
Edward Street
Stockport
SK1 3UR**

Lead Inspector
Susan Winson

Announced Inspection
6th 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	Stockport MBC Fostering Services
Address	Stockport Social Services Ponsonby House Edward Street Stockport SK1 3UR
Telephone number	0161 474 4611
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Stockport MBC
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 27th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Stockport MBC has a Family Placement Service which provides a range of placements to meet the needs of children and young people. These include permanent and temporary foster care and emergency placement, kinship care and specific schemes provide for mother and baby placements, teenagers and short break care.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection involved speaking with the service manager, team managers and staff of the fostering service and records were made available.

The inspector also observed family placement panel, attended a foster carer support group and a meeting of the training team. Three foster carers and the young people placed with them were visited at home.

Completed questionnaires were received from six young people, five foster carers and no placing social workers.

What the service does well:

Children's and young people's needs are clearly being met in foster placement and as foster carers are well trained, they are carrying out specific tasks, such as life story work, where appropriate. There is effective monitoring through the LAC reviewing system. Young people were positive about the care and support they receive.

The fostering team has a group of experienced and skilled staff who are effective in ensuring that foster carers are supported and enabled to meet young people's needs. The fostering service can evidence that young people are making progress in placement.

The fostering team is well managed and committed to continuing to raise standards and improve services to young people. The family placement officers and support workers know the foster carers and young people well and are able to provide effective support and supervision of placements. A large majority of foster carers with whom the inspector had contact were positive about the support and assistance they receive.

Staff and foster carers continue to have access to a range of training opportunities, including NVQ's, and several foster carers are involved in the delivery of training.

The fostering panel is effective in its functioning and effective in scrutinising the approval of foster carers, in addition to providing advice to the fostering team on specific matters. Its members have a relevant and valuable range of experience and its meetings are well organised and well chaired.

Stockport MBC has a clear commitment to encouraging participation and consulting with foster carers and young people. Foster carers are involved in service development and are empowered to advocate on behalf of young people in their care. Young people said that they are encouraged to voice their views and are listened to.

The service has an effective recruitment strategy with high quality promotional materials which is effective in attracting and processing enquiries and applications.

The fostering service has consolidated its role within children's services in Stockport and is now regarded as a valuable part of overall planning, both for individual young people and at a wider strategic level. The service has links with Stockport's Looked After Children Nurse who attends multi-agency group on support to foster carers (chaired by the service manager for the fostering service), is involved with planning and delivering training and who visits young people to discuss health issues. Similarly, there are strong links with Stockport's Educational Support Team which includes early years and further education.

What has improved since the last inspection?

A number of positive developments in the service, which have been implemented during the last two to three years, have now become accepted as usual practice and it is evident that they have contributed to improvements in outcomes for young people in foster care.

Comprehensive support plans have been piloted which outline young people's specific needs and how these will be met in placement. These are multi-disciplinary and include action planning and review dates. Together with care plans, matching and planning meetings there is evidence that more coherent and robust systems are developing to ensure that young people's assessed needs are being met in a planned way within reasonable timescales.

Links with other services (both internally and externally to the organisation) continue to strengthen and benefit young people in foster care.

Foster carer training has enabled more foster carers to carry out specific tasks with children and young people in their care in a skilled and effective way. With support from the FPO's and social workers, they are carrying out pieces of work which include moving on to adoption, helping them to understand their past, improving self esteem and promoting attachments. Foster carers were largely very positive about the value of training.

Support to foster carers has improved due to workers from the Community Outreach Team being allocated to foster carer support. Foster carers now have better access to services out of office hours.

Kinship foster carers' access to the services provided has increased with an improved take-up of training and a support group is in place.

What they could do better:

Written information about young people's needs and history, including medical information, is not yet consistently provided to foster carers, both in-house and in IFA's. Despite the continuing efforts of the fostering service, the quality of the information is variable.

Foster placement agreements continue to be variable in care planning and detail about how young people's needs will be met in placement. The developing use of support plans (see above) will be beneficial in this respect.

The perceived inequality of provision of support and assistance with transporting young people and use of taxis was raised by foster carers. The manager is aware of foster carers' views and is taking steps to address this.

Foster carers expressed dissatisfaction with the delays in implementing the new payment system.

Short break services remain an area for further development.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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 good. The fostering service can demonstrate that young people's health and development is largely promoted. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

In addition to the fostering service working to ensure that foster carers have full health information on young people, prior to or soon after placement, this is also monitored through supervisory visits and LAC reviews which check that health folders are in place and being kept up to date. Despite this, some foster carers still do not have the health folders for children who have been in their care for considerable time.

However, it is evident from records and discussions that foster carers are aware of young people's health needs and ensure they are met. The majority of young people have had health assessments regularly, although some decline to do so. Letters were on files from the Looked After Children nurse making arrangements to see young people and also outlining her role.

From records and discussions with staff of the fostering service and foster carers, it is evident that young people are mostly accessing those specialist services which they have been identified as needing. Some improvements were reported in young people getting appointments with mental health services more quickly and there are representative from CAHMS on multi-agency planning groups and meetings.

The fostering service's systems for monitoring the administration of medication in foster homes is now more effective, as foster carers have become used to completing the forms and sending them in. Records demonstrate that non-prescription medications are used appropriately. The manager stated that she monitors the files and follows up the information as necessary, but as yet she does not note this in the monitoring files.

Children and young people are involved in choosing healthy foods, know about healthy eating and healthy lifestyles and are encouraged to take exercise.

Training is provided for foster carers which includes emergency first aid, sex and relationships, drug guidance and health promotion.

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 good. The fostering service and fostering panels are largely effective in ensuring that young people are safe in foster care. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is managed by people who are suitably experienced and qualified. All staff have CRB's prior to starting work and these are renewed three yearly.

In the sample of files inspected, all statutory checks had been completed prior to foster carers having children in placement and there was evidence of updating. Systems are in place to ensure that foster carers' CRB and other checks are carried out every three years and this is monitored through their annual reviews, as are health and safety checklists and pet ownership forms.

Foster carer assessments are thorough and written references and records of interviews of personal referees are comprehensive and focused on applicants' abilities to keep children and young people safe. Some placing social workers who provided their comments for foster carer annual reviews commented positively on the stability of placements.

Foster carers receive appropriate training and appear to achieve a positive balance between nurturing, encouraging independence and safe care. It is evident that foster carers put safe caring policies into practice and are well trained in helping young people to keep safe. Numerous examples demonstrate a commitment to working on safety issues, such as road safety and stranger danger. Risk assessments were largely in place for the children case-tracked which identify specific risks and which show an improvement in risk management planning.

Links with SMBC's safeguarding children's unit have strengthened through the attendance of a member of the unit at team meetings four times a year. This was said to be useful in maintaining a high level focus on child protection, improving communication and in addressing issues such as allegations against foster carers.

Gaining full information to inform matching and care planning from placing social workers remains problematic for family placement service and foster carers. Some care plans and chronologies were seriously out of date and the extent to which the Looked After Children documentation is completed remains extremely variable. All files contain records of regular file audits which highlight outstanding issues and detail corrective actions.

Notes from planning meetings, including matching meetings, are held on file and demonstrate that there is ongoing monitoring of how young people's needs are being met in placement. A formal matching policy is now in place.

Foster placement agreements are not always specific in identifying how young people's needs will be met in placement nor in outlining how gaps in matching will be compensated for. Generally, they are variable, with some being very brief. Where support plans or matching reports for permanent placements augment the foster placement agreement, there is much more detail and clarity about how young people's needs will be met in placement.

Foster carers receive training which helps them to understand the underlying factors in regard to challenging behaviour and which equips them to manage behaviour in positive ways. Examples were given where positive behaviour management strategies resulted in young people's behaviour stabilising.

The fostering panel is well organised, well supported administratively and effectively chaired. The range of members' experience is wide and positively adds to its functioning, scrutiny and quality assurance role. The inspector was able to observe a panel meeting where a policy issue was identified as needing clarification and referred to the fostering service for action. Applicants attended panel where they were greeted and prepared for joining the meeting by the chair.

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 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is good. The service values diversity and promotes educational achievement to the benefit of children. Short break care is in need of further development to improve outcomes for children. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Stockport MBC has an emphasis on valuing diversity through the Race Equality Scheme, Gender Equality Scheme and the Disability Equality Scheme which are linked to improved information and training for staff and improving services. A written equal opportunities policy is in place. Pre-approval and ongoing training for foster carers incorporates anti-discriminatory practice.

Examples were given where young people whose first language is not English were given effective support through the educational support team, ethnic diversity team and the interpreting service. Also, young people were supported to practice their religion and provided with appropriate diets.

Since the last inspection a system has been put in place which ensures that aids and adaptations are provided to children with disabilities and their carers. The managers stated that this is working in practice and examples were given which bore this out. In addition, there is a process for SMBC assisting in funding for extensions to houses as necessary.

From discussions with staff and foster carers and from records it is evident that young people are being supported in education and encouraged to engage in appropriate leisure activities. Friends visit foster homes and sometimes stay overnight.

Foster carers are engaging in school meetings, including Personal Education Plan meetings, so are aware of young people's educational needs. School attendance is good and examples were given where young people have received achievement awards. Appropriate training is provided for foster carers to equip them to support young people in education. SMBC's Education Support Team is involved closely with the service and, in addition, provides information and expertise to access appropriate education placements for individual young people.

Stockport MBC is committed to the government's Aim Higher initiative and projects are located across the authority with the focus being on increasing looked after children's access and take-up of higher and further education.

Short breaks for children with disabilities in Stockport have been carried out by an independent agency until September 2005 when it was transferred to the fostering service. Short breaks are also used to prevent children coming into the looked after system. There have been some positive developments but it is acknowledged that this is an area for further work once extra staff are in place, including the strengthening of links with the mainstream fostering service.

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 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. The fostering service promotes and encourages consultation and young people's contact with their family and friends. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is committed to children and young people maintaining contact with significant people. In complex situations and those involving a high number of family members, meetings have been held to arrange and co-ordinate contact arrangements. Many foster carers clearly spend a considerable amount of time on supporting contact arrangements, including transporting young people over considerable distances.

Foster carers are involved in delivering training (including pre-approval training) and their presence is valued by foster carers who attend. There is a Stockport National Foster Care Association whose representatives meet several times a year with the fostering service management group to discuss issues which have arisen, including those from support group meetings.

Work to involve young people in training, recruitment and developments of the service is continuing with the involvement of the Children's Rights Service. Young people in foster carer said they are encouraged to express their views and are listened to by their foster carers. One young person said that his children's rights worker had visited him twice and accompanied him to his review, within a three month period of being in foster care.

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 and 29

Quality in this outcome area is good. The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood. Fostering allowances need to be clarified. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

From files sampled it is evident that young people are being well prepared and are being encouraged to increase their life skills in foster care, according to individual age and abilities. Pathway plans were either fully completed and clear about the needs of the young person or were in progress of being compiled.

From discussions with foster carers it is clear that they maintain an appropriate balance between encouraging independence and safe care.

Stockport MBC has recently changed to a 19-plus team. Already, there are positive indications that this will better support young people through transition and leaving care but it has not yet been in place long enough to access its effects on improving outcomes for young people and young adults.

Some concerns were expressed by foster carers at the delay in implementing the revised payment scheme and this is being addressed by the manager.

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, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. The fostering service is well managed and staff and foster carers are well trained and supported to meet the needs of children in placement. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

There is a statement of purpose which accurately reflects the functioning of the service. The fostering service is well monitored and managed by people with the necessary skills and experience. There is effective use of the skills within the team and FPO's are supported and supervised.

The fostering service has a skilled team who have a variety of relevant experience and who are well managed and motivated to work to improve the service. FPO's and support workers know the young people and carers well and in discussions were clear about their combined roles of support and supervision of placements. FPO's have access to a range of training which includes assessment of foster carers, child protection, multi-agency training on education planning and computer skills.

There has been increased staffing within the fostering service, including workers from the community outreach team who have been trained in parenting skills. This is a developing service which will increase support to foster carers and young people. A formal referral system and a service arrangement agreement are in place and COT worker's records are comprehensive. They have clear tasks and carry out focused pieces of work, including helping and supporting a young person to attend his statutory review, self esteem, keeping safe, building resilience and planning for leaving school and further education.

Further staffing increases are planned, including another management post, to sustain and advance service development.

Foster carer assessments have improved in quality and clearly outline the potential, strengths and learning and support needs of applicants. It is evident that foster carers' own sons and daughters are involved in the process and receive information to prepare them. The service uses outside assessors who are supervised by the fostering team manager.

On the foster carer files inspected, supervisory visits had been carried out within the timescales contained in the fostering service's policies and procedures (a minimum of six weekly intervals). They are well recorded, contain full records of discussions and action planning, as well as outlining progress that young people are making in foster care.

Records demonstrate that the majority of foster carer reviews are carried out within the timescales and the reports presented to reviews are comprehensive and include information on when CRB's and other checks were last carried out. The service has improved on the format of review forms to make them more informative and clear.

Foster carers said that the training has been useful and provides good information and advice. It is evident that the training is effective, as it is evident that the foster carers who the inspector met with demonstrated skills and a depth of knowledge in many areas, including child protection issues, attachment and moving children on to adoption. Stockport's staff development team and the fostering service work together effectively to ensure that foster carers have access to a wide range of training, including courses which are designed to meet specific needs identified by the fostering service. Joint training with social workers and other professionals serves to enhance understanding of roles and communication. Foster care agreements are in place which outline the service's expectation that foster carers will continue to attend training.

All Family Placement Officers' caseloads now contain some child specific carers and the manager reported that this is working a lot better than having a separate FPO in place. It is evident that the policies and practices of the service are now mainly in place for child specific carers, who say they are better supported now. Family placement officers have discussed alternative legal routes with the carers, some of whom have now gained residence orders.

Supervisory visits are recorded in a new format which includes checking on families' safe caring policies and practices. Child specific foster carers now have the same opportunities to attend training as other foster carers. Support groups for child specific carers are now in place.

The fostering service (along with the adoption service) have an office manager who is also the Looked After Children team's manager. This arrangement had only been in place for a short time prior to the inspection and the manager had identified her priorities and was working on the business plan. It is expected that a shared manager will be valuable in integrating systems across the teams in Stockport. An increase in administrative support to the fostering service is planned for the near future.

Team managers attend SMBC's placement panel and there is a clear system for accessing IFA placements. Work has started on the development of more formal policies and procedures for the monitoring of placements with IFA's.

The service is also targeting recruitment to provide foster carers who can meet the needs of young people who are presently placed outside SMBC's provisions.

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	4
6	4
8	3
9	4
15	3
30	4

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	4
11	4

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

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	FS8	34(3) and Schedule 6	Stockport MBC must ensure that foster placement agreements fully comply with Schedule 6 of Regulations. (Not fully achieved by 01/06/056.	01/03/07

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	FS8	Stockport MBC should continue to develop policies and procedures for placements with independent fostering agencies.
2	FS31	Stockport MBC should ensure that there are policies and procedures in place in respect of short term breaks and continue to improve the service.
3	FS8	Stockport MBC should continue to work across the Looked After Children service to ensure that all foster carers are provided with full information to meet the needs of young people in their care.
4	FS12	Stockport MBC should continue to work across the Looked After Children service to ensure that all foster carers are provided with full health information to meet the needs of young people in their care.
5	FS29	Stockport MBC should clarify the support to foster carers including financial support.
6	FS17	Stockport MBC should continue with plans to provide sufficient staff to support service improvements.

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