



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Regional Foster Placements (South West) Limited

**113 North Hill
Plymouth
Devon
PL4 8JY**

Lead Inspector
Jim Palmer

Announced Inspection
4th December 2006 01:37 pm

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	Regional Foster Placements (South West) Limited
Address	113 North Hill Plymouth Devon PL4 8JY
Telephone number	01837 55674
Fax number	01837 55719
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Regional Foster Placements (South West) Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jennifer Fitzgerald
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 20th March 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

South West Placements offer a range of placements for children and young people of all ages, in the geographical area of Devon, Somerset and Cornwall. These include planned and unplanned placements, long term, short term and respite care. The agency specialise in placements for children who have complex needs and may have had previous placement disruption. The agency works closely in conjunction with other professional such as health and education.

SUMMARY

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

This was the second inspection of the Devon and Cornwall branch of Regional Foster Placements (South West). The service is established Devon, Somerset and Cornwall, it has a main office in Plymouth with a further sub branch in Ilfracombe.

The inspection took place between 4th and 08th. December 2006. The views of children, foster carers, placing social workers, staff and managers were sought to enable the inspectors to make their judgements. Both of the office locations were visited and foster carer's, children's and staff files were examined. A support group was attended and four foster carers were visited at home.

At the last inspection, in March 2006, 10 Statutory Requirements and 4 good practice recommendations were made.

Significant work has been put into place since that inspection to meet to requirements and recommendations. At this inspection, one Statutory Requirement remains from the last inspection. This remains because whilst had been undertaken to meet this requirement, some information gaps still remained as a result of requested information not yet having been returned, on some carers and staff files. This will be re-assessed at the next inspection

Questionnaires returned indicated a high level of satisfaction with the service and foster carers told the inspectors that they felt well supported by their fostering social worker and that the company had provided a good level of post approval supervision and training.

Since the inspection was undertaken the inspector has been notified that the registered manager has left the company. It is essential that both the temporary and longer term management arrangements, ensure that the progress made to date is consolidated.

The inspector would like to thank the young people, carers, staff, and manager for the assistance and co-operation in conducting this inspection.

What the service does well:

There was a high level of motivation and enthusiasm amongst staff and carers. There was a strong willingness, to improve the quality of the service provided.

The agency has provided a high level of support to foster carers, the recording of foster carer supervision was detailed and of a high quality. The recently introduced post approval training programme for foster carers was comprehensive and foster carers said they felt their training needs were adequately met.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Significant work has been undertaken to fully implement the requirements and recommendations of the last inspection. Only one requirement remained not yet fully implemented. These improvements are identified in the text of the report.

What they could do better:

The service needs to ensure that it holds all of the information on staff and carers files to ensure that it can evidence all people have been safely recruited.

It needs to continue to ensure that foster carers are provided with sufficient information, particularly medical information to ensure they can fully meet the needs of young people.

The service needs to review the regional management structure and ensure the service can be appropriately managed across the region.

All young people's files should hold all the information required and all entries on all recordings, should be legible, signed and dated by the author.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by

contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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.

Health needs of children may not always be fully met as a result of variable quality information being provided by placing social workers.

Quality in this outcome area is now **good**.

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

EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection held in March 2006 two statutory requirements were made against Standard 12. Since that time much work has been undertaken to ensure that medical consents are in place for each child and that full medical information is sought for each child placed. Some of this information is still taking some time to be provided by placing authorities, however there is evidence that the service is taking a pro-active, position on gathering this information.

There is now an audit process in place to ensure that consents for medical treatment are now in place. Managers, social workers and carers all told the inspectors that despite new paperwork that has been introduced, medical information, is not always being provided for carers in a timely manner. This could have a detrimental impact on young people's medical needs being fully met. There is however evidence that the agency is taking reasonable measures to secure missing information. The work undertaken by the agency in this area since the last inspection is good, however the the agency should not accept placements for children where local authorities do not provide all of the pre placement information required.

The company has also introduced "health passports" for children and young people, this is a positive development.

The work undertaken by the agency in this area since the last inspection

Both of the previous requirements in this section have now been met, but further work needs to be undertaken in cases where missing information is still not forthcoming from placing authorities a good practice recommendation has been made.

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

Significant improvements to the matching of children to carers, the recruitment of staff and the training of panel, have reduced the risk that children, carers and their families may not be kept safe.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

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

EVIDENCE:

The Manager has substantial experience family placement work and holds required qualifications to manage the service. The Manager has demonstrated that she has a sound knowledge regarding the safeguarding and promotion of welfare of children. There was substantial evidence that the manager had provided positive leadership in the implementing the requirements and recommendation of the previous inspection.

The assessment of foster carers was found to be thorough and detailed. At the last inspection, the following findings were made.

“Health and safety checks of carers’ homes had been undertaken as part of the initial assessment process and there was evidence of risks being appropriately

managed. Foster carers homes were risk assessed annually, these were renewed as part of the annual review process. There were risk assessments in place for identified hazards such as pets and use of foster carer transport.

Foster carers' homes, which were visited, were well maintained, homely, pleasant and able to meet the needs of the children placed there. In the cases inspected children did not on every occasion have their own room. In some cases siblings shared large bedroom accommodation; this had been comprehensively assessed and the arrangements examined were acceptable. The pre approval training for foster carers included information on health and safety responsibilities and carers were given practice guidance.

When matching children to foster carers, there was evidence that a number of carers had been considered for particular children's as referrals were received by the agency. The inspector was told that planned placements were carefully managed, with introductions taking place over a period of time to ensure that the correct match had been made. This was not possible in the case of emergency placements.

Since that time new matching paperwork has been introduced, and whilst it is too early to establish whether this has had an impact on placement stability and outcomes, there is now evidence of matching the needs of children to the skills and abilities of carers. The requirement made at the last inspection is now met.

New child specific risk assessments have been introduced, these are now used in conjunction with the health and safety checklists and safe care guidelines for carers to create more specific child focused risk management plans. The requirement from the previous inspection is now met.

At the last inspection a requirement was made as a result of foster placement agreements not covering all of the information required. Since then new placement agreement forms, have been introduced, which now capture all of the information. The manager told the inspector that she has not received any feedback expressing any concerns from carers.

All of the new documentation is being introduced retrospectively is being introduced for all new placements.

New Foster Carer agreements which hold all of the information required under schedule 5 are now in place for all newly approved carers; previous foster carer agreements will need to be reviewed at the annual review of foster carers.

Foster carers spoken to confirm that they had received child protection awareness training and were confident that they knew how to refer any concerns to the appropriate agencies.

The manager had introduced a system to collate information concerning any allegations made. Carers were made aware of inappropriate sanctions.

At the previous inspection not all staff files held all of the information required by schedule 1. There is now evidence that the manager is monitoring the staff requirement process to ensure that robust checks are in place. New CRB clearance checks have been requested for staff, but as these had not all yet been returned and as a result some gaps in information still existed, this requirement will remain until the next inspection.

Supervising social work staff were all professionally qualified social workers, those spoken to had a good knowledge of their role and an appropriate background and work experience. The service also employs resource workers who worked closely with families to support the placement.

All assessment examined had been carried out by professionally qualified social workers.

The inspectors were impressed by the knowledge and professional approach and dedication demonstrated by some of the fostering social workers.

The inspector was not able to attend panel as part of this inspection, however the inspector was told that panel members had now received training provided by the Fostering Network, and as a result panel members were now more confident in their role.

At the previous inspection, the panel lacked experience, and as a result would have benefited from gaining more experience and being provided with additional training. The inspector was told this had now happened.

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

The educational attainment of children is well supported by the agency. They also now provide more written evidence to confirm that the cultural and individual needs of children are being met.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

EVIDENCE:

The company has introduced further training for carers in issues concerning cultural awareness, these issues are also now considered within the new matching arrangements recently introduced.

There was evidence on foster carers' supervision notes that supervising social workers had discussed the educational needs of children and that the carer had been supported in meeting the child's educational needs. This was verified by discussions with carers. The agency also provided resource workers who will support foster carers if a child is temporarily excluded from school. This support was highly valued by carers, there was however some suggestion that there may be insufficient support in some areas.

The agency has recently appointed an Educational Welfare officer whose role is to liaise with local authorities, and the inspectors was told that the agency

intends to recruit a qualified teacher, who will offer an IT based educational support package that will offer additional support to support workers, working with children who are excluded from school.

Foster carers have the primary responsibility for liaising with schools and local colleges, if required fostering social workers will also liaise on behalf of carers. Foster carers reported feeling well supported by both their supervising social workers and support workers when young people are excluded from school.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10;11

Contact arrangements are supported by the agency.

Arrangements for consulting young people on the running of the service should be strengthened.

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**.

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

EVIDENCE:

At the previous inspection, one requirement was made that contact arrangements be recorded within placement agreements, and one good practice recommendation was made, that the agency strengthened consultation with young people and their families regarding the running of the service.

At this inspection, contact details are contained within the newly introduced placement planning arrangements. This requirement is now met.

Young people were encouraged and supported in attending reviews and planning meetings. Young people also had the opportunity to express their view at foster carers annual reviews. There was also some evidence that supervising social workers met separately with children in addition to the placing social workers role.

Whilst the views of children and their families is sought at the time of annual foster carer reviews, this tends to focus on the carers and not how the service is run and could be improved. The agency still need to improve the way in which it seeks the views and opinions of young people and their families, as to the quality of service the agency provides. This good practice recommendation will remain.

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):

29

Carers were paid promptly, however financial arrangements were not clearly set out in the placement agreement that could lead to misunderstandings around financial responsibilities.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors were told that payments to carers were clear, understandable and paid promptly; any errors that may occur had been rectified in a timely manner. No foster carers raised payments as a concern however, it would have been positive to see each financial arrangements set out clearly with each area of responsibility defined in the placement agreement, particularly where they relate to additional expensive leisure activities/ holidays.

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; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25; 26

Generally, this service is well managed, there are sufficient staff and carers, who are well supported and provided with good opportunities for personal development.

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

EVIDENCE:

There is a statement of purpose that accurately described the services provided.

Local management in both the Plymouth and Ilfracombe offices, provided clear leadership, and there was evidence of a high level of management skill being demonstrated in both offices. Since the last inspection, the agency has closed a sub branch in Okehampton, but retained the offices in Plymouth and Ilfracombe. This has led to some staff having to re-locate, some carers based in the Okehampton area told the inspector that they felt that the ability to call into the office and resolve any issues locally, has been reduced as a result. One of the perceived strengths of the organisation was that it was able to respond easily to local issues. Whilst there was no evidence that the change of office locations has had a detrimental effect on the support and supervision that carers receive. The organisation does need to be mindful of the need to communicate clearly the rationale for such change, if they are to retain the motivation and goodwill of both carers and staff.

The Ilfracombe sub-branch, has continued to develop it's role, and discussions may need to take place as to whether this constitutes a sub-branch or a branch in it's own right.

Since September of 2006 the Plymouth based manager has taken on a more regional and has taken on management responsibility for staff and carers who were previously managed from an office based in Gloucestershire. This was a temporary arrangement agreed with the Commission, however, it is the view of the inspector that this is too wide a span of control and too large a geographical area. A more permanent management arrangement for the Gloucestershire operation needs to be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

All staff spoken with were aware of lines of accountability. All social work staff received supervision from appropriately qualified supervisors. Each established office had dedicated administrative support, in the absence of one office administrator; those duties were covered by a colleague in the other office.

All staff had written contacts and job descriptions. There were sufficient suitably qualified and experienced staffs to meet the current needs of the fostering service. The company has written policies regarding training, supervision and workload distribution.

Staff received training opportunities, there was an annual appraisal scheme for all staff and staff told inspectors that they received a good level of professional

development opportunities. There was evidence that joint training with foster carers being held regularly.

The agency has recently appointed an NVQ centre manager, this role is to develop NVQ based training throughout the organisation, with a view to developing an NVQ accredited centre for both staff and carers. The staff training programme links closely with the annual staff appraisal scheme. The NVQ centre manager is working closely with a staff member based in the Plymouth office in developing joint training models. This is a positive development.

At the last inspection a requirement was made that Foster Carer needed to contain all of the information held under schedule 5.

A new foster carer agreement has been introduced and is used for all newly approved carers, existing carers will have new foster carer agreements following annual reviews. The new agreement covers all of the areas required, however lacks specific detail in two areas, namely, paras 11 and 12 of schedule 5 which could provide more explicit detail, a recommendation has been made.

The agency demonstrated that the role of the foster carer had been effectively managed. Foster carers were supervised regularly and supervision notes were detailed. The agency had a strategy for developing carers via the use of support groups, and supervision and post registration training. Both foster carers and supervising social workers were clear as to their respective roles foster carers were given advice and guidance on dealing with other professional agencies such as health and education. Both foster carers and staff felt they were given appropriate levels of supervision, training and opportunities for personal development.

At the last inspection the arrangements for out of hours support was discussed and it was agreed to review the arrangements. That review has now taken place, and staff, have been consulted with over on call arrangements.

A decision was taken to retain the existing arrangements, No carers expressed concerns at being able to contact out of hours support, however some of the carers living in the Okehampton area expressed some concern at the closure of their local office and felt this could result in some delays in contacting their supervising social workers. They did however confirm that they felt well supported by those workers.

The inspectors were shown copies of the post approval training programme that was provided for foster carers. Carers confirmed that they had attended training and that supervising social workers discussed carers training needs as part of the supervision process and at annual review.

There was evidence that the manager was monitoring the quality of the service as required under Regulation 42(1) Schedule 7. There was also evidence of regular auditing of the service and service records by managers. Despite this process, a number of files had entries that were not signed or dated by the author. A recommendation has been made.

There are facilities in each office for the secure retention of records in both locked rooms and locked steel cabinets. Access to each of the buildings is secure and there are adequate systems to back up computerised records.

A number of new policies and procedures have been introduced since the last inspection. It is recommended that the revised child protection policy removes reference to the term "internal strategy meeting", and that the new policy be agreed in consultation with the local safeguarding board.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	2
15	1
30	X

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	2

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

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

yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS15	20	The agency must obtain all the information under Schedule 1 in order to hold evidence regarding the fitness of staff	01/05/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS12	The registered person should ensure that foster carers are

		provided with full medical information on each young person placed prior to the start of a placement.
2.	FS11	The agency should devise a system to ensure that the views of children and families are ascertained regarding all matters concerning the service
3.	FS5	The responsible person should review the temporary management structure across the South West region, as a matter of urgency, to ensure appropriate spans of control are maintained.
4	FS9	The registered person should ensure that the child protection policy is revised and fully accords with LSGB guidelines.
5.	FS25	The registered person should ensure that all entries on all recordings are legible and signed and dated by the author.

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