



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Rochdale Child Care Services - Fostering

**Foxholes House
Foxholes Road
Rochdale
OL12 0ED**

Lead Inspector
Lynn O Driscoll

Announced Inspection
5th-7th and 15th September 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	Rochdale Child Care Services - Fostering
Address	Foxholes House Foxholes Road Rochdale OL12 0ED
Telephone number	01706 710750
Fax number	01706 715033
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Rochdale MBC
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council provides a Fostering Service which recruits a range of carers and trains and supports them to meet the needs of children and young people in their care. At the time of the inspection the service provided for 207 children and young people in foster care, of which 89 were girls and 118 were boys, within the age range of 0 - 18 years old.

Rochdale Fostering Service is based at Foxholes House and is approximately 1 mile from the town centre. The Fostering Service team consists of a team manager who oversees the operation of the service, a senior practitioner who deputises in her absence, supervising social workers who visit carers at least once every two months, a support worker, a recruitment/publicity officer and administrative support.

The Fostering Service is described within the Statement of Purpose as being *"committed to providing the best service for children and young people and the foster carers. With a belief that better lives, better opportunities and better outcomes can be secured for Looked After Children and Young People by working in genuine partnership with a focus on the following themes: Child centred philosophy, partnership approach, support for carers, commitment to training, the value of education and continuous improvement."*

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was called a "*proportionate key inspection*" which means all the key standards and the Regulations still needed to be looked at, but any good practice from the last Inspection in March could be included in this report.

It took place over 4 days with two inspectors. Staff, foster panel members, carers and young people's files were read, home visits were made and meetings with managers and staff took place. One inspector met a group of carers at a training session.

The fostering service also sent some information called the "*data set*" and the "*annual quality assurance assessment*" to the Commission before the start of the inspection which helped the inspectors to decide what to concentrate on during the visit.

A few weeks before the inspection, questionnaires were sent to young people aged 9 years and over, carers and social workers and their replies are also included in this report.

What the service does well:

The service makes sure that children and young people are fit and healthy. One young person wrote "*my carer makes sure I eat lots of fruit, drink lots of water and that I do loads of exercise and she keeps me healthy*"

The children and young people seen were happy living with their carers and 18 out of the 19 who returned a questionnaire said they were "always" well cared for. One wrote "*They do a lot for me and keep me safe and keep me healthy and fit and more!*"

They also said that they are helped to do well in School. One wrote "*I get help with my homework at home and I get help with my work at School*".

Carers feel well supported by the fostering service. One carer described her supervising social worker as "*brilliant-cant fault her*". One supervising social worker said, "*we support our carers well and that is why they stay. We ring them at least once a week. That is the culture on our team*". The Manager agreed that because of the excellent support they have a good "*retention*" record which means they keep their carers.

Staff said that the team support each other well and they have a good and "*very supportive*" manager. They get regular and good quality supervision. The manager described the team as "*very committed and on the ball*".

There is good liaison between supervising social workers and field social workers which is really important in making sure children and young people feel safe and are happy.

Carers are good at supporting contact arrangements, which can sometimes be quite complicated and difficult.

The Manager said, *"The service is still progressing and developing"*.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Carers can now get on training courses much easier. One worker said, *"the training section are getting on board now and giving carers priority. Child protection is usually hard to get on, but they created a space"*.

The support worker has really helped the team. One worker said, *"when we are training she makes sure all the small details are sorted which makes such a difference"*

A senior practitioner has been appointed to deputise for the Manager.

The administration team have all been trained on the new IT system.

The service have successfully recruited Asian carers. Carer's now have a list of Doctors who will do circumcisions on request.

Carer's allowances have increased and a special grants procedure introduced. The Manager said, *"we pay over and above and have never stood still on this"*.

There are more level 3 and 4 carers who are very experienced and can offer more specialised care.

As recommended at the last inspection, a Regulation 42 report has been produced by the manager which looks at the quality of the fostering service. This will be presented to the corporate parents forum in September.

The out of hours support service has developed.

What they could do better:

The service must make sure that every child and young person knows how to make a complaint should they ever need to. They must also be given lots of opportunities to give their opinion on the care they are receiving.

Staff and panel member's files must include all the details which are listed in Schedule 1. This is an outstanding requirement from the last inspection and must be given priority attention. The system to make sure CRB's are renewed every three years needs to be improved upon. Panel member's files should include the date they started this role to make sure they do not stay on the panel for more than six years.

All foster care agreements must cover all the areas listed in Schedule 5.

All foster placement agreements must cover all the issues listed in Schedule 6.

The Manager must provide evidence that all the details listed in Schedule 7 are checked.

All health and safety checklists of carer's homes must take place once a year.

There should be a safe caring policy in every carer's home. This should be looked at often to make sure it is still relevant and up to date.

All carers, including family and friends, must be reviewed at least once a year. This was a requirement made at the last inspection and the timescale for completion is 30/11/06. A better system to make sure this happens is recommended.

It would be good practice for carers to get their own copy of the recordings of supervisory visits.

Some carer's had experienced delays in getting their payments.

All carers and supervising social workers must be trained in child protection by 30/11/06 which was a requirement made at the last inspection. There needs to be a better system to show what is "*mandatory*" training for staff and carers (which means what they must do) and when they have actually completed these courses.

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 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. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

The arrangements in place for promoting the health and development of fostered children and young people are good.

EVIDENCE:

This Standard has been met in full consistently over the last three inspections with good outcomes for children.

Nineteen questionnaires were returned from young people and 16 confirmed that they *"always"* get support and advice about being healthy. Examples given included *"eating healthy food and exercising"*, *"healthy eating and skincare"* and *"I eat lots of fruit and vegetables and I brush my teeth twice a day"*

The sample of children's files read and visits to carer's homes on this occasion evidenced that holistic health needs are identified and met. The carers spoken to were also clear about their expectation to maintain health records and appointments, which is then shared in statutory reviews. The diaries seen were satisfactorily maintained as was also found at the last inspection.

A letter received by the Commission prior to this inspection from the fostering service's medical advisor also confirmed that health needs are promoted. This consultant paediatrician stated that all carers receive *"thorough"* training exploring common health issues, physical and emotional development and inspectors in March wrote *"supervising link workers, foster carers and the manager demonstrated their experiences and involvement in training during the pre approval process on issues relating to health."*

The medical adviser also confirmed in writing that every child/young person is registered with a GP and "most" with a dentist but "*dental treatment can be obtained via the Community Dental Service*". The Annual quality assurance assessment (AQAA) returned by the fostering service recognised the need to collate information for carers about the local health services available, especially in regard to dentists.

The nurse for looked after children ensure immunisations are up to date and annual medicals are undertaken. Carers benefit from a dedicated psychologist to support them to meet assessed emotional needs and have access to other specialist services including drug and alcohol misuse and sexual health. One carer visited had received support from a "B.I.P." worker to enable her to respond appropriately to challenging behaviour.

The service wrote in their AQAA, "*we still maintain good access to health services*" but intend over the next twelve months to improve upon "*information exchange and integrated working with the CAMHS services*".

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 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

To ensure children and young people remain safe, better systems must be introduced and/or tighter adherence to those already in place.

Basic safeguards include ensuring all the required checks and details are on all staff files, ensuring they are all trained in child protection training, full annual health and safety checklists are undertaken and safe caring policies are in every carer's home.

EVIDENCE:

This inspection commenced on the first day that a new manager had taken up this position so the previous manager was actively involved in the process. She was interviewed at the last inspection in March and was found to be suitably qualified, experienced and competent. Her personnel file was also examined to find it contained all the relevant information to evidence her suitability.

The new manager was interviewed as part of this inspection to find that she too is suitably qualified and experienced. Her personnel file, however, was not examined as this had not been sent from Human Resources but she did confirm receipt of a new and satisfactory CRB prior to taking up her new position. She also maintains her own training portfolio.

The homes visited as part of this inspection provided sufficient space and were clean and comfortable and suitably decorated and furnished. One conservatory, as an example, was really child friendly and full of age appropriate toys and craft equipment.

The pre approval training covers health and safety issues and a health and safety checklist should be updated every year prior to the carer's annual review but files read showed that some, but not all, had been undertaken and/or were not completed in full.

At the last inspection it was found that that the local fire service visit carer's homes and provide advice on fire safety.

The children and young people spoken to as part of this inspection confirmed that they were happy and felt safe with their carers and 18 out of the 19 young people's questionnaires returned confirmed that they "*always*" feel well cared for in their current placement. Comments included, "*my carer treats me like a daughter and her daughter treats me like a proper sister*", "*I get well cared for and I am happy*" and "*we eat nice meals, she takes me to the park and buys me nice clothes*".

Discussions throughout this Inspection showed that this fostering service is committed to providing good matches. The panel chair was interviewed who stated that because there has been an increase in the numbers of approved foster carers they can now "*usually*" meet assessed needs. The shortfalls are teenagers with complex needs that are referred to an independent fostering agency and they have another contract to provide short break carers for children with disabilities.

The Manager stated that they have about 50 children placed with agencies throughout the North West to meet their specific needs and some of these are in long term placements and very settled so regardless of cost they will not disrupt them.

The F2 reports inspected contained information about why siblings are not placed together, contact arrangements and how identified needs will be met. The placement plans seen contained specific cultural and ethnic needs. One carer was described as "*very respectful of birth parent's wishes*" This placement provides a perfect match in regard to religion, no issues in respect

to language and the carer has been to the library and got books on the child's heritage and cooks Italian meals. Another family visited offered an excellent match in respect to language, culture and religion.

Training is provided on cultural diversity and those foster carers with transracial placements are particularly encouraged to attend. Foster carers, including a Muslim carer who had attended this training said it was particularly good. One carer described it as *"the best training I have ever been on – absolutely brilliant-very interesting"*

The service have been so successful in recruiting Asian carers that they now have a surplus and three are without a placement so the management team are looking at the challenge to ensure that they have the skills to look after white British children.

All of the above is good practice but the foster placement agreements seen did not contain all of the information required by schedule 6 which needs addressing.

All the children and young people spoken to and those who returned a questionnaire stated that they were not being bullied.

Two carers spoken to said they had received *"excellent"* training in child protection, managing challenging behaviour, attachment disorders, recognising abuse, safe caring and developing self esteem.

The pre approval training and the core training for carers includes safe caring issues and those carers visited were very clear about this. Safe caring policies were in place in the majority of the files examined and the home's visited and were found to cover the needs of individual children, but one of them was not dated or accurate and none of the family and friends carers have them which needs priority attention. It was also evident that these are not regularly updated as they did not for example include information about mobile phones or computer use and car safety, although on the safe caring training observed, these matters were discussed and those in attendance were advised to update their safer caring policies to include this information.

It was a legal requirement at the last inspection that all carers and supervising social workers are trained in child protection by 30/11/06 but the training data provided did not provide this evidence nor did the staff files as they were still not suitably maintained.

In the AQAA, the manager specified two improvements in the next twelve months in respect to staying safe which are to *"enhance training opportunities"* and to *"improve links with the Child and Family Support Service, particularly the Out of Hours Team"*

Examination of the records of complaints and allegations evidenced that they are taken seriously, fully investigated and timely outcomes reached. For one carer specific input is now being provided through CAHMS to see whether they have the capacity to change and the service awaits this report. In the meantime, extra support is being provided by the supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

Despite being a requirement at the last inspection, the personnel files examined still did not include all the information as detailed in Schedule 1. They were also not indexed or in any chronological order.

Secondly CRB's should be renewed every 3 years but examination of the data sheets showed that in some cases this is still not happening. This is a fundamental safeguard and must be satisfactorily addressed.

Given that this service was inspected in March it was agreed that any outcomes met at the last inspection could be included in this report so the panel was not observed on this occasion. The last report reads *"An observation was carried out of the fostering panel and confirmed the panel continues to be set up and organised in accordance with the Regulations. The information prepared for the panel was thorough and well presented. There was evidence of all panel members views being taken into account and any conflicts of interest are disclosed before applicants and professionals are invited in. Observation and panel minutes provided evidence that there is clear decision making around the approval and continued approval of foster carers including recommendations around future social work practice"*.

It was recommended at the last inspection that panel members receive ongoing training and the manager of the service confirmed that training on the assessment process is taking place before the end of the year.

The panel have a quality assurance function and the chair said that as the reports are not always of a consistently high standard she will comment upon it before panel and sometimes will withdraw the item if she feels there is insufficient information. She then raises these issues with the manager of the service and the agency decision maker.

The independent panel member with a background in education has recently resigned and a new one is being sought.

The panel members files examined did not record when they took up this position so it was not possible to discern whether any had exceeded their term of office.

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 and 13. Standard 31 was not assessed as no short break carers were Identified on the data set

Quality in this outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

Overall the opportunities for enjoying and achieving are good.

EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection the foster carers and staff confirmed that the pre assessment and approval training underpins the authorities equal opportunities and anti discriminatory practices. The Recruitment and Marketing Officer was also interviewed and the displays and leaflets seen used positive imagery and the leaflets were produced in a variety of translations. The main issue for the inspectors was the need to recruit more carers that reflect the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the children and young people needing placements. The inspectors on this occasion were satisfied that this has been given priority attention. (See the findings under "Staying Safe" in respect to matching)

In response to the question, in your opinion how well does the fostering service address issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability? 3 carers who returned a questionnaire ticked excellent, 1 excellent/good, 1 good and 1 adequate. One carer wrote, "*I have a Christian*

and a Muslim child and the fostering service have been excellent in ensuring my awareness of the needs that each child has in their culture and individuality”.

The same question was asked in the social worker’s questionnaire. There were 5 returns of which 1 ticked excellent, 3 good and 1 adequate.

One issue raised was that of a Muslim boy who was initially placed with a white British carer which resulted in delays in circumcision and whispering in the ear. These were addressed as soon as possible once the child was with a Muslim carer and the manager said they had learned from this and have now drawn up a list of Doctors who will perform circumcisions so that it is not delayed for any future baby boys. The service used the expertise and local knowledge of the foster carer to help with this.

There were good examples of carers enhancing children’s confidences and feelings of self worth and one child was eager to show the inspector her photographs. One welcome book had been written by a nine year old and was consequently very user friendly.

The children visited were also involved in lots of age appropriate and constructive leisure activities. Examples provided in questionnaires included, learning to play the trumpet, dance, rugby union for Rochdale under 14’s, football and swimming.

There was good evidence that the education of children and young people continues to be actively promoted and one young person visited had achieved 100 % attendance in her current placement. All those visited were receiving education suited to their specific needs. One child who was behind with her reading has improved dramatically over the summer holidays with encouragement from the foster carers. Another child visited had been excluded from school prior to her current placement but with the carer’s support is now doing really well in mainstream education and *“the teachers have reported that there has been a big improvement in her behaviour”*. Three other children visited had received very good school reports and were attending and achieving well.

In a questionnaire one young person wrote *“I always go to school, work hard, listen well and get on with my work”*.

The service confirmed in their AQAA that *“attainment at GCSE has improved for looked after children in Rochdale”* and *“dedicated education support can be*

accessed via specific staff within Rochdale's pupil referral unit". Additional literacy support was offered at the summer fun project.

The majority of the young people who returned a questionnaire confirmed that they *"always"* receive the right help with their education. Four specifically wrote that they get help with their homework and other comments included, *"I am encouraged to study and to do homework"* and *"my nan helps me a lot"*.

Carers who returned questionnaires and those visited were equally satisfied with the support they receive to help the children they care for achieve educationally. One wrote *"my youngest, with assistance from his and my social worker along with my endeavours now attends a fee paying Grammar School paid for by the Local Authority"*

Computers have been provided to carer's home for young people to access and carer's confirmed that firewalls were in place.

There was ample evidence that Foster carers have established positive relationships with the relevant schools, attend parents meetings and keep copies of children's school reports. Personal education plans were on the files examined as was also found at the last inspection.

In the AQAA , the Manager identified two areas for development in the next twelve months in respect to enjoying and achieving which are to *"make more support available in homes via education and Child and Family Support Services"* and *"set up a virtual school for all looked after children to improve monitoring, tracking and targeting of support"*.

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):

Quality in this outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

Overall the opportunities for young people to make positive contributions are good

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service continues to promote appropriate contact with significant others in line with legal directions and children/ young people's expressed preferences. Any restrictions are recorded on files. All the carers interviewed were clear about the contact arrangements and were actively involved in supporting children to have contact with siblings and birth parents.

Foster carers visited evidenced that they record contact arrangements in their diaries. They note any impact of the contact on the child and inform their social workers.

As regards consultation, 16 young people who returned questionnaires confirmed that they are "*always*" helped to think about their future but one ticked "*sometimes*" and 2 "*never*". Examples given were carers, reviews, therapy sessions and connexions. The majority of the young people also ticked that their carers "*always*" listen to them and take notice of their opinions, one ticked "*usually*" and one "*sometimes*" but unfortunately there was a much wider response in respect to their own social workers.

Carer's, in their questionnaires were asked , how would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about their day to day lives?. In response one ticked excellent, four

good and two adequate. One commented "*young people rarely want to be involved with social workers but they are given every opportunity to get involved*".

In response to the question, how would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about how the fostering service is run, 1 ticked excellent, 2 excellent/ good, 2 good and 2 adequate. One carer wrote "*Both children are involved with children's rights. They have interviewed trainee social workers and councillors. They are active in getting what they want and they think they are entitled to* "

Rochdale contracts with Spurgeons children's rights and advocacy service to provide independent advocates and visitors to children and young people when needed.

In respect to making a positive contribution the service's AQAA reads, "*Children are consistently encouraged to make their views known via looked after children reviews and initiatives facilitated by the Children's rights service*" and in the last twelve months "*the Listen Up group have recruited new members*". "*Periodically the local authority solicits the views of its looked after population around specific themes of subjects and a survey into their views of education has just been completed*" The service aims to "*liaise with more children in foster care*" over the next twelve months and specifically to feedback the outcomes of the survey to all fostered children.

The manager of the service told the inspectors that Foster carers own children are consulted with during the approval process. They also attend the skills to foster training to advise prospective foster carers about fostering from their perspective. An identified area for development by the service is the provision of their own ongoing support group.

Some young people have been involved in interviewing new staff which is recognised good practice.

Other opportunities to express their views include the annual advocates and children's trip and this year they went to Blackpool for the day and through a project which has recently been set up to develop a young people's support team newsletter. All looked after children in Rochdale were invited to participate and at present two have taken up this offer.

There was documentary evidence that two of the children case tracked were fully consulted about their plans and were actively encouraged to express their views but this was not evident for one identified young person. In fact on two separate occasions the child has said she did not want to stay with a particular carer long term but there is no evidence to show that the social worker or supervising social worker has investigated this further. Indeed it would appear unlikely that she has had the opportunity to make an effective contribution to

her own plans as she had only been seen once by her social worker in six months and on that occasion the carer was present. She was then told of the decision by a supervising social worker, the carer and the play therapist which is not appropriate.

The Foster carers review is due on 15 September but the young person has not been asked to give a view on what it was like to live there. The supervising social worker said she usually asks children once they have left as she feels they are more able to speak openly then. Whilst this may be true, it is important to try and ascertain the views of children who are being matched long term with their carers.

Most of the children/young people who returned a questionnaire said they knew who to speak to if they were not happy or had a personal problem. Several named their carers, social workers, families and teachers. One had an independent visitor.

Not all the children who returned a questionnaire said they knew how to complain which needs addressing. – (see also the “management” section in respect to the children’s guide)

Areas for development as a result of listening to children include the chance for them to have their own ongoing support group.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

Overall the opportunities for achieving economic well being are good.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 14 was met in full at the last inspection. It was not assessed in any depth on this occasion as the carer the Inspector planned to visit who had older teenagers placed with him was unfortunately rushed into hospital. During the last Inspection in March it was found that prior to young people reaching the age of 16 the Young People's Support Team provide advice and support on a range of issues, such as health, education, training, employment, living skills and accommodation. An allocated worker from this team will then be involved with the young person and their foster carer in planning a transition into adulthood and a pathway plan drawn up in consultation with the young person.

The manager of the Fostering Service said continued developments are taking place between the Fostering Service and the Young People's Support Team to ensure a consistent approach is taken when advising young people about independent living. Training is available for carers around The Leaving Care Act. An area of improvement in the last twelve months identified by the service in the AQAA, has been to offer "*enhanced training to carers on preparation for independence issues*".

The manager also gave examples of some former foster care placements which are now supported living arrangements, enabling young people to stay in placement until such a time as they are ready for independent living.

Improvements the service intends to make in the next twelve months includes *"introducing regular liaison sessions for carers of teenage children with the YPST staff"* and *"providing more clarity for carers and young people in relation to support post 18"*.

The AQAA reads that *"Rochdale MBC pays it's foster carers Fostering Network rates or significantly enhanced rates"* and the foster carers spoken to confirmed that the allowances paid were adequate to meet the needs of the children and said they can access further funding if needed.

The Manager stated that carer's allowances continue to increase and they now receive a very good standard of payment. They also have access to a grant for special equipment. One carer visited has been given financial support to provide a safe and child friendly outdoor play area. Another carer had received all the necessary baby equipment she needed very promptly.

An area of improvement over the last twelve months identified in the AQAA has been the increase in and consequent enhanced payments to level 3 and 4 carers which enables them *"to plan for a child's care and activities with a considerable degree of independence "*

Two issues highlighted was that since the last inspection identified carers were not paid the enhanced allowance for ten weeks because the responsibility for making payments had transferred to a new office worker in the service. By the time this had been resolved they were owed £2500

A supervising social worker interviewed also raised the fact that recently mistakes have been made in payments. It was also mentioned that carers only receive £3 if they provide day care for another carer.

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):

1, 4, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is good. The judgement has been made using available evidence including a four day visit to the service.

Staff feel well supported by competent managers and carers are equally satisfied with the support from committed supervising social workers.

Better systems need to be in place and/or stricter adherence to those already established to ensure reviews take place within the legal timescales, CRB's are renewed every three years and Schedule 7 monitoring is evidenced.

EVIDENCE:

One foster carer visited showed the inspector a copy of the children's guide that she said had been sent to her so she had stored it away with all her other documents. She wasn't sure, however, whether the two children had seen it or not. Added to the fact that a number of young people who returned questionnaires did not know how to complain, the service is advised to send an age appropriate copy to all children and young people. (See also the section on "Staying Safe")

As recommended a Regulation 42 report has been prepared since the last inspection and will be presented to the corporate parents forum on the 19/09/06. This first attempt was very factual and the managers were advised at the feedback session that future reports should include details of how the manager intends to improve the quality of the service. Secondly although a cabinet has now been set up to monitor all the particulars detailed in schedule 7 none of the information had been transferred. This legal requirement was discussed in some detail with the new manager to ensure this is addressed without delay

The Manager has recently retired from the service but has agreed to work two days a week for the next couple of months to ensure the new post holder is fully inducted and receives ongoing support, which is really good practice. They were both involved in this inspection and their skills would appear to complement each other. An excellent staff morale has been maintained by the previous manager which clearly positively impacts on their capacity to support carers. There were a number of gaps in systems found in this inspection, however, which appears to be the new manager's forte so this would seem to be a very timely transfer of responsibilities.

Since the last inspection the senior practitioner post has also been filled which provides additional management support and a deputising role. There is now one full time vacancy to be filled which is currently being covered by an Agency worker who has worked for the service for over twelve months.

All the supervising social workers interviewed as part of this inspection confirmed regular monthly effective supervision with the manager. They also have weekly team meetings and confirmed open and honest discussions.

The Service was found to be sufficiently staffed to meet its roles and responsibilities and all the staff interviewed reported manageable workloads and good support mechanisms.

There was particular satisfaction among carers with the range and quality of training on offer. (See also section on "Staying Safe") Some new carers particularly commented on how valuable the induction training was and how experienced foster carers attend and contribute to the training.

Carers now maintain their own training portfolio and are issued with certificates which were shown to the inspector during the home visits.

One manager said the training section is "*very creative*" in meeting identified needs and another said, "*they are far more inclusive of carers*".

Foster carers are encouraged to do NVQ level 3 and to be assessed as level 3 and 4 carers which has a financial incentive. This involves a commitment to attend a minimum of 4 training sessions per year.

As recommended at the last inspection, all administrative staff have now had training on the new IT system to be introduced in March 07 and it is anticipated that all staff will have completed this training before the new system roll out.

The panel chair confirmed that members receive annual training but new members do not have induction training to include for example, the roles and responsibilities of the panel and what to look for in assessment and matching. They would also benefit from access to other core training for example equality and diversity and child protection.

Training sessions for carers are on offer every month in the evening and in the morning to give foster carers a choice. One Inspector observed a morning session on safer caring that was well attended. Carers were found to be open and felt comfortable enough to ask questions. The supervising social worker told the inspector they try to put training events on to coincide with identified needs of carers which are discussed as part of their annual reviews.

All the carer's met were satisfied with the support they received from the fostering service. The Manager stated this has always been one of their strengths, "*I have been a carer myself and the support has never faltered-the team are committed to keep it alive and this is proven by our retention*".

Comments from the eight carers who returned questionnaires included, "*they are there at all times offering full support*" "*they support us best by being available whenever required and supply what is needed*" and "*I can contact anytime of the day and emergency at night and support is there. What is needed is sorted out*".

Carers receive a supervisory visit at least every six weeks and they also receive telephone calls to offer advice and support. Notes of supervision visits

are recorded by the supervising social worker but copies are not always given to foster carers which is recommended good practice.

Foster carers said they receive additional support from each other through the buddying / mentoring system. Informal buddying is established following the initial training and foster carers are encouraged to develop and use these links, which they find so valuable.

A respite care arrangement was in place for one child case tracked. This was successful and valued by both child and foster family.

An out of hours service has been set up since the last inspection. It is still in its infancy and its effectiveness has yet to be assessed but it is available to foster carers and to the general public. The team is made up of family workers who receive referrals for planned out of hours interventions, advice and assistance as well as emergency assistance outside of office hours. This team offers support to, and is supported by, the Emergency Duty Team.

There was ample evidence of good liaison between the children's social worker team and the supervising social workers.

The panel chair said all reviews come to panel and there has been a noticeable improvement in the timescales as more are now within twelve months than have been in recent years.

One file examined, however, showed that an identified carer had been reviewed on the 5/8/05 which was their first since 8/2/01. Moreover they have not had one since and are therefore overdue again.

The panel chair also said that some reviews come to panel without up to date CRB information and the documentation sometimes says "*pending*" and to date, she has recommended these be approved. This is of concern and should not continue. The inspector found no evidence of an updated CRB check since 6/9/01 for these same carers even though they had been matched long term with a child during the last year. The review documentation of 5/8/05 records "CRB pending" yet according to the service's CRB spreadsheet the CRB was not even applied for until 25/10/05. According to the records it has still not been received and the foster carers were unable to show one to the inspector.

The CRB spreadsheet gave evidence of a number of carers whose CRB checks had not been obtained. (See also the section on "Staying Safe")

The majority of files examined were in good order and included the required particulars but the foster care agreements seen do not include all the details as specified in schedule 5 which needs addressing.

The carers met had all received appropriate background information about the children prior to placement to enable them to meet their needs. All documentation was securely stored away. They also understood the

importance of taking photographs and compiling a life history, including special events, for the child and some lovely examples were seen during home visits.

One carer visited had received training in life story work and moving children on and had experience of successfully moving children on to adoptive placements.

The co-ordinator specifically employed to support kinship carer's was interviewed as part of this inspection. She attended specific training last year, has visited another Local Authority to share best practice and is booked on a course about "special guardianship".

Very recently all kinship carer's have now been transferred from the social work team so she currently supports 26 which she confirmed was manageable. She stated that the managers closely monitor her workload and there is the provision for the support worker to help out.

As regards any new carer's, a field social worker still undertakes the initial assessment and if the child/ young person has remained in that placement by the date of the first statutory review, the co-ordinator attends and completes a full assessment.

She has produced a much smaller version of the carer's handbook and is currently talking through the important issues during her supervisory visits. She is also actively encouraging attendance on training courses.

She has developed a review format but to date very few have had an annual review and none have safe caring policies in place which needs addressing. At the present time there is no expectation on them to maintain diaries but they are expected to record significant incidents.

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	2
8	2
9	2
15	1
30	3

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	3
29	2

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

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.	FS6	35	Health and safety checks on carer's homes must be completed in full and signed and dated in preparation for discussion at every carer's annual review.	30/11/06
2.	FS8	34	Every foster placement agreement must cover all the matters listed in Schedule 6 and should clearly identify how any gaps in match will be addressed	31/03/07
3.	FS9	35	Supervising social workers should ensure that safe caring policies are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary and signed by all members of the household. Where children share a bedroom this should be included or there must be a separate risk assessment in place	31/03/07
4.	FS9	17	All carers and supervising social workers must be trained in child protection.	31/03/07
5.	FS15	20	Staff and panel member's files must include all the particulars as specified in Schedule 1. This is an outstanding legal	30/11/06

			requirement. The original timescale of 31/5/06 has not been met	
6.	FS15	20	All staff working for the Fostering Service must receive a Criminal Records Bureau check every 3 years. This is an outstanding legal requirement. The original timescale of 31/5/06 has not been met	30/11/06
7.	FS11	35	All children and young people must have every opportunity to make an informed view about their care and especially about long term placements. They should always have the opportunity to make their feelings known in a way that makes them feel safe and comfortable.	30/11/06
8.	FS1	3	The Service must ensure that every child in foster care receives a children's guide in a format appropriate to their needs	30/11/06
9.	FS4	42	The Manager must be able to evidence that Schedule 7 monitoring is taking place	30/11/06
10.	FS21	29	All foster carers and family and friends foster carers must be reviewed for approval at intervals of not more than a year.	31/03/07
11.	FS22	28	The service must ensure that all foster care agreements include the particulars specified in Schedule 5 and are signed and dated. An amended version should be forwarded to the Commission	31/03/07

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.	FS15	Panel member's files should include the date they commenced this role to ensure they do not exceed their legal term of office.
2.	FS29	All payments to carers should be made promptly and at the agreed rate. Additional staff should be suitably trained in the administration of payments to avoid mistakes and unnecessary delays.
3.	FS1	Carers should be actively encouraged to spend time with the children and young people going through the Children's Guide and especially making sure that they know how to complain should they ever need to exercise this right.
4.	FS19	Specific induction training for panel members is recommended and access to other core courses
5.	FS21	Carers should receive a copy of the supervisory visits records and sign and date them.
6.	FS21	<p>A system should be introduced to flag up when CRB's are due for three yearly renewal so that they can be applied for before they expire.</p> <p>Panel must check whether up to date CRB and other pertinent checks are in place.</p>

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