



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Family Services - Placement & Adoption Services

**First Floor, Unit 21 Green's Industrial Estate
PO Box 38
Calder Vale Road
Wakefield
WF1 5PF**

Lead Inspector
Stella Henderson

Key Announced Inspection
24th January 2007 09:00

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	Family Services - Placement & Adoption Services
Address	First Floor, Unit 21 Green's Industrial Estate PO Box 38 Calder Vale Road Wakefield WF1 5PF
Telephone number	01924 302167
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Wakefield MDC
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Sandra Westgarth
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 30th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service, which is part of Wakefield MDC family placement service is set up to provide foster care for children who are looked after by the Council. Included in the family placement service is the adoption and fostering for permanence service. Foster carers are recruited and assessed by fostering social workers and then considered for approval by Wakefield's fostering panel. The fostering service offers a number of different fostering arrangements, which include: emergency, short term, long term, permanence, Connect, remand and family and friends as carers. The Connect scheme offers short planned breaks to young people and children with disabilities.

The family placement service office fully accessible with automatic entry doors, level floor entry to building, lift to all floors, disabled toilets and ground floor meeting rooms. There are reserved parking spaces for people with disabilities.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out over approximately four days. Evidence was obtained from a variety of sources, such as case files, policies, records, and other information provided by the manager. Discussions were held with the manager and staff from the family placement team, and visits were made to foster carers and children in placement. Their views, and those of their foster carers made an important contribution to this inspection, as did the comments in questionnaires returned from children, foster carers and placing social workers. Information from the children's advocacy service, the Raising Educational Attainment for children in Care (REACH) team and the Looked After Children Health nurse also helped to inform this report.

What the service does well:

Carers generally feel well supported, and there was a good deal of feedback about individual fostering officers with respect to their helpfulness and professionalism. Children and young people are supported in their education and their health and welfare is promoted. The fostering service is good at consulting with children and young people. Children and young people reported feeling safe.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The majority of placing social workers and foster carers feel that the service has improved over the last twelve months. One social worker felt that "it obtains appropriate placements" for children and young people, and "provides carers who are committed to the role they play in the child's life". Children and young people continue to feel supported in school, encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and are given plenty of opportunity to pursue hobbies and other activities.

What they could do better:

Panel recommendations depend on the fullest information being made available, which has not always been the case where child protection enquiries have been concerned. The provider must ensure that the recording of the process and outcomes of such enquiries is clear to panel members.

There is work to be done on more clearly demonstrating to social workers the work that is undertaken by the fostering service in helping to achieve positive outcomes for foster children.

The manager must ensure that, through monitoring procedures, carers have been provided with risk assessments, and that the foster placement agreement includes reference to the matching process.

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**

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

Children and young people have appropriate knowledge of healthy lifestyles and feel encouraged and supported in developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Partnership working and agency practices specifically address and promote the health of looked after children.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people who returned their surveys and those who spoke to the inspector indicated that they were helped to stay healthy, to keep regular appointments with doctors and dentists, and encouraged to eat healthy food. "They want me to grow up to be fit and healthy". Files inspected evidenced detailed information on health issues.

Carers also reported being supported in achieving good health outcomes, particularly in terms of specialist help that may be required. For example, one carer commented that consultations with CAMHS were offered with regard to a particular problem. Training is also available to carers about health related matters, including sexual health and misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Some placing social workers reported their concern about foster carers smoking in front of children in their care.

The service has dedicated 'looked after children' nurses who undertake visits and annual health assessments. The service has a good record of achieving

these assessments, and arrangements are in place to identify 'refusals' and work further at these with targeted input from the LAC Nurses.

The inspector recommends that a system be implemented for tracking and monitoring the outcomes of referrals to the CAMHS service.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**

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

Staff and carers are properly vetted before commencing employment. Children are placed with carers who are appropriately prepared and supported to meet their needs. Adequate safeguarding is compromised by delays in foster care assessments being brought to panel, which means that important checks are out of date. Unclear recording of the process and decision-making of child protection inquiries undermines panel's ability to make sound recommendations. Staff employed by the service are properly vetted before commencing employment.

EVIDENCE:

All employees and foster carers are subject to appropriate checks, and CRB and other checks are renewed within recommended timescales. The service has now been advised on the guidance for keeping CRB checks between inspections. Files inspected were compliant with Schedule 1 of these regulations, however the service should make telephone enquiries to both validate and follow up written references.

Foster carers receive annual unannounced visits, health and safety checks and supervisory visits. Historically, children have been allowed to share bedrooms whilst in the care of the authority, however there is a presumption against this within the standards and the manager has advised that new foster carers will not be approved unless they can provide a child with their own bedroom. Existing carers are being made aware through support groups that there will be a risk assessment of all situations of sharing and in reaching a decision the manager will take into account both the needs and the views of the child/children.

Some placing social workers commented that the service strives to "provide carers who are committed to the role they play in the child's life", and some also felt that it was "good that the service is de-registering poor carers, but as a consequence they are now short on resources".

Where possible, the service makes every effort to ensure that introductions to planned placements are properly co-ordinated and progress at a pace to meet the needs of the child. One young person explained to the inspector that this has been his experience, and one social worker commented that a young person "was in the fortunate position of being offered an introductory visit to two separate foster placements...being able to choose a placement that she felt would meet her needs has made this a positive placement".

Some foster carers and placing social workers indicated, however, that on occasion children and young people "often move in quite rushed and unplanned ways" and "it is rare that the service offers young people a choice about placements". Another stated that she was "offered good quality choices of placements for babies but there is nothing to offer older children with more complex needs".

In discussion with fostering social workers, the inspector found that every effort is made to match children and young people with carers who have the skills and experience to meet their needs. The inspector also observed how the electronic system works to enable duty workers and others to see assessments of need, risk assessments and profiles about children and young people awaiting placement.

Despite this wealth of information, however, there was evidence in one case that this information had not been properly taken into account, or shared with the foster carers. This resulted in poor matching, placement breakdown and the new carers wondering whether they should continue with fostering. None of the children's files or foster carers files inspected demonstrated that matching had taken place, and foster carer files did not include Foster Placement Agreements, which must be completed **before** placement and which should contain specific reference to elements of matching that were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement.

The fostering panel tries to ensure that only those who have been thoroughly assessed are recommended for approval. Cases presented are thoroughly scrutinised, and panel plays an important role in the safeguarding and quality assurance process.

The inspector expressed concerns, however, about the length of time cases are taking to be presented at panel (nearly two years in some cases) as this not only impacts on available resources but also means that essential information such as Criminal Record Bureau and other checks and information will have lost their relevance. The service must make every effort to reduce this delay, but where this occurs, panel should ask that updated information be provided.

Time limits for friends and family assessments are also being exceeded, and some cases for de-registration are also taking up to two years to come before panel, which again, is clearly unacceptable.

Panel has properly raised questions about the quality of S47 inquiries and has expressed concern, on occasion about the quality of S47 inquiries. The inspector shares this concern. Panel are sometimes asked to make decisions about matters based on S47 enquiries, the process and outcomes of which are not always entirely clear. This has implications for whether such cases, if substantiated, should be referred to the Protection of Children list.

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, 31

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

The fostering service encourages children and young people to attend school regularly and to do well, but each must have a Personal Education Plan. Carers develop good relationships with schools and other educational providers. The service is rated highly with respect to equality and diversity, however some carers feel the service could make improve for children with disability.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers, staff and children and young people rated the service highly with respect to equality and diversity. The service offers training in diversity and equality, which are well attended by foster carers. A programme of "Total Respect" training is also delivered, and young people take part in delivering this training.

Where short term breaks are concerned, the evidence was that parents are still very much their children's main carers. One foster carer noted that she had received positive help with caring for a child with disability, but some other carers for children with disability felt that "performance was poor" in terms of addressing their needs. One professional commented on their survey that the transition process for young people who have a disability is often disjointed.

There is a dedicated team to support foster children with their education. Young people felt they were supported with school attendance and homework. "They help me with my homework and I go to after school clubs, which helps me" noted one young person. Another said "I am helped to think about the future...what kind of training I need to do to get me far."

Foster carers felt they were given support in this respect "The REACH team is excellent in supporting and providing extra activities" said one carer, and another commented that "The REACH team support worker is excellent".

Some social workers felt that the REACH team had made a difference to outcomes, but some social workers indicated that they did not know how the fostering service contributed to positive educational outcomes for foster children. One professional raised the concern that foster carer competencies do not include aspects of education.

Although the majority of children and young people have a Personal Education Plan on file, the service must take steps to ensure they are completed for every child and young person eligible.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

Children and young people are asked for their views, and these views make a difference. There is an advocacy service that all children and young people can access easily. Contact with family and friends is promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Feedback from young people, social workers and carers indicated that contact with family and friends is encouraged and supported, bearing in mind any safety issues for the child concerned. One young person, whose parents are overseas, explained to the inspector that he is able to phone his parents each week. There is a contact course for carers and these issues are discussed at assessment process and before any child is placed.

There was clear evidence of consultation and communication with children and young people, and their survey responses feel that they do feel listened to. One young person stated that "Not all my opinions are (in their eyes) correct, but they are all heard and considered". Some commented that their carers "always listen to me and give me advice about the future". The service was able to give examples of things that had changed as a result of listening to children and young people.

Carers and staff attend Total Respect Training, which in part facilitated by young people in foster care. Children and young people have access to advocacy and know how to raise a complaint. The inspector recommends, however, that letters sent to children and young people in response to complaints should state whether these complaints are upheld or not.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

14

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

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

The fostering service ensures that services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

EVIDENCE:

One young person explained to the inspector that he was being very well supported by his carers in helping to develop his independence, and to make decisions about his future. A pathway plan was in place for this individual, and there was evidence, in discussion with his carers, that specialist help was being sought where necessary.

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, 4, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 32

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**

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

Staff express job satisfaction and confidence in management. There are good quality assurance processes in place, but some basic standards still need to be embedded in practice in a consistent manner.

EVIDENCE:

A clear Statement of Purpose is in place and is available to staff and carers, and a young person's guide is also available.

The manager of the service is viewed positively by carers, staff and social workers. She is described as providing 'focussed leadership' and effective supervision. The manager has a good overall view of the service, and there are good quality assurance mechanisms in place. Closer monitoring needs to be undertaken, however, with ensuring that requirements made in inspection reports are implemented in practice.

Foster carers reported good communication and good individual working relationships with family placement officers and responses from returned surveys were largely positive. One stated that "our experience is a positive one and we have good support and feel that we are listened to" and the majority of carers felt that the service has improved over the last year.

The service has gone through a good deal of change in terms of management and support workers, and the team is still not fully staffed, although a recruitment strategy is underway. One carer stated "One thing I have found disconcerting is the change over of staff...(I) have had a chain of support workers in the last few years...and what about the children who have seen several workers come and go? When will the department settle down and get on with the job in hand?"

Placing social workers also had mixed views about the service, and some responses indicated that some do not fully understand the role of the fostering service in improving outcomes for children and young people. The proposed Improvement Plan for the service may help to address this and reinforce the concept of 'corporate parenting'.

The delay in bringing family members to panel is discussed elsewhere, but generally the service makes every effort to ensure children and young people remain within their families where it is safe to do so.

This outcome is assessed as adequate as although this is a service that is improving, some basic standards still need to be embedded in practice, and the more robust management of the service that is aspired to has yet to translate into effective performance in all the outcomes required for children and young people.

Case and administrative records were in order and compliant with these regulations.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
31	3

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

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

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

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	FS8	34	Before making a placement, a foster placement agreement which covers the matters specified in Schedule 6, must be in place	31/03/07
2.	FS9	17	Risk assessments to be provided to the foster carer to enable them to provide appropriate care for the child (Previous requirement 10/04/06)	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	FS4	The manager should ensure through monitoring processes that basic standards are embedded in practice
2	FS17	There should be sufficient staff to adequately meet the

		needs of the fostering service
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