



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Associates South

**21 Cumberland Place
Southampton
Hants
SO15 2BB**

Lead Inspector
Lynda Mosling

Announced Inspection
14th November 2005 10:00

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Foster Care Associates South
Address	21 Cumberland Place Southampton Hants SO15 2BB
Telephone number	01527 556480
Fax number	01527 556490
Email address	frank.ward@thefca.co.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Foster Care Associates Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Frank Ward
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 10th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates (South) is a registered independent fostering agency providing foster placements for young people placed by local authorities. Foster Care Associates is a limited company with over 50 offices across the U.K. The south has approximately 108 foster placements in the region. The region includes area offices in Southampton, Isle of Wight and Worthing, West Sussex. Foster Care Associates' mission statement states: 'Foster Care Associates is a national organisation providing high quality family placements to children and young people at a local level. We want to provide the opportunity for those children 'looked after' to achieve their full potential'.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection took place over four days and was undertaken by two inspectors. The inspection included visits to six foster homes across the region, interviews with a large range of staff and managers and a visit to all of the area offices. Questionnaires were received from carers and young people. The regional director was available throughout the inspection.

At the time of the inspection there were a number of changes anticipated within the staff group. This follows the resignation of an assistant director, the ending of the secondment of another assistant director and the moving on of several other staff. In addition the service has seen some carers move to another local agency. (The new agency has historic links with many of the FCA carers and staff). The staff morale was therefore lower than at the previous inspection. However, the feedback from young people and carers was that the service is providing good care, the support to carers is good and that staff remain committed to the welfare of young people.

What the service does well:

The staff and managers working for the service are well qualified for their roles and present as committed and efficient. The young people and carers said they were 'reliable and knowledgeable'. During the inspection they spoke with understanding about the difficulties experienced by the young people placed.

The foster homes visited were providing safe and comfortable accommodation for the young people. The carers were aware of health and safety issues and operated a safe caring policy. One young person, in a questionnaire, said 'I can relax and I don't have to worry about anything and I get treated as if I am a part of the family and I feel that I am a child being loved again'.

The service has a number of forums for young people to feed back their views about the service. Young people spoken to said they are 'listened to' and felt they could make a difference to the service. Many had previous experience of being fostered with other services and compared Foster Care Associates favourably to those services. They particularly liked the fact that they got to know the social workers, managers and other staff. This led to a feeling of identification with the service.

The records showed that the appropriate procedures had been used when recruiting staff. Job descriptions, notes of interviews etc. were all on file and demonstrated a good match of skills and experience to the jobs offered.

Support to carers was seen by most as good, with some saying that it was 'brilliant'. Each carer has their own allocated supervising social worker who visits regularly. Carers said they found this a helpful process and also said they felt they could speak to the director, or other staff, if their supervising social worker was not available. Carers spoke of personal support and support with their own children. This led them to feel valued by the service.

Records seen within the offices were clear, well organised and up-to-date.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The leaving care project will be up and running with a dedicated social worker based at the Southampton office. The development of this service should provide additional opportunities for young people post 16 years.

The service has reviewed its delivery in the light of local competition and changing demands for the service. Although this has led to some difficult decisions i.e the closing of the Poole office, it has demonstrated a realistic understanding of the need to continually review the service and the most efficient use of resources.

The service has developed links with advocacy services for young people and are more confident in challenging, or supporting carers to challenge plans that do not appear to be in the best interests of the young people.

The service has reviewed the charging policy and is looking at providing more flexible packages in order to keep up with changing demands.

What they could do better:

Gathering information from local authorities is still a difficulty. There are times when the information received at the referral stage is too brief to make an informed match of the needs of young people with the skills of the carers. The service can demonstrate efforts to gather this information, but there are occasions when the service may need to decide to turn down the referral unless vital information is available.

Although training continues to be provided on a regular basis some staff are concerned about the move to give social work staff the lead for training and expect most of the learning to be cascaded down through the staff group. The agency remain committed to training and many staff felt their training needs were being met. Discussion with the staff group about their expectations of training would be helpful.

Staff morale has been affected by the number of staff and carers who have left the service, or are planning to leave. This, and the closing of the Poole office, has prompted some staff to have fears for the future. Whilst the Director has confirmed that there is no concern about the financial viability of the service the staff would appreciate open and honest discussion with the corporate managers of the service.

The fees paid by the agency are felt to be fair by carers, but there is an issue with regard to the lack of retainers paid between placements. Some carers have made a career change to become a foster carer and have no other income. When placements end they are understandably anxious about meeting their financial commitments. Whilst the agency makes this policy clear at the point of initial contact with prospective carers it would be helpful to review this, especially in the light of issues of retaining carers.

Carers very much appreciate the respite care offered to them and feel this enables them to care for some very demanding young people. However, changes in policy have led to fewer opportunities for respite care. The agency is intending to recruit more respite carers in 2006 to address this problem.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The agency promotes the health and development of young people placed.

EVIDENCE:

All of the young people placed by the agency have access to health care, usually by registering with the foster carer's family doctor. Assessment of young people's health needs is made at the point of placement and is reviewed at the Looked After Children (LAC) reviews. Records seen showed that this had been done and the assessments included those by psychologists, therapists as well as medical practitioners. Young people spoken to confirmed that they are able to make their own appointments with the GP and are only accompanied by their carers at their invitation.

Each young person has a health passport that can travel with them to further placements. The passport holds information about medication, doctor's appointments, dental check ups, accidents, injuries and hospital treatment. It also has a record of growth and a list of childhood illnesses. The value of the passport depends on the information available about the young person's medical history and the young person's co-operation in completing the records. However, when completed it is a helpful check about the monitoring of young people's health.

The agency employs therapists to work as part of the team. They undertake assessments of a young person's therapeutic needs. They provide advice to the carers on strategies to manage day-to-day difficulties and are a valued part of the Team Parenting process which aims to clarify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved with the child.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9 and 15.

The safety of the young people is a priority for the agency. They have safe recruitment practices, appropriate policies and procedures and thorough assessment of foster carers. Matching young people to carers is hindered somewhat by the lack of information from placing agencies.

EVIDENCE:

The manager has the relevant experience and qualifications to manage the service. His qualifications include: BA Honours in Sociology/Public Media, Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, Diploma in Practice Teaching and Approved Social Worker under the Mental Health Act 1983. The manager was seen by carers and staff as being knowledgeable, approachable and friendly. They spoke of him being 'good fun' as well as an effective manager. There was evidence of the manager visiting foster carers to offer support, talk through difficult issues and thank them for their work. One carer said, 'I can always talk to the Director (manager of the region) if my link worker is not available'. The staff files looked at showed that appropriate checks are made, including review of the CRB every three years.

One of the staff has a specific responsibility for recruitment within the Southampton area. This also feeds in to the corporate recruitment strategy. In other areas, i.e the Isle of Wight, the recruitment process starts with a visit from the area manager to determine whether the prospective carers should go

ahead to assessment. It was clear from speaking with the staff that they had a good understanding of what they are looking for with regard to foster carers and felt they are their most valuable resource. The Form F assessments that go to the Fostering Panel for recommendation were seen to be very thorough and generally well written. The assessment includes a health and safety checklist of the accommodation and includes psychological profiles on the household pets to determine likely risks. The foster homes visited as part of the inspection all provided warmth, comfortable furnishings, single rooms for each foster child, and good standards of health and hygiene. The carers confirmed that they had had the health and safety checklist completed and the files showed required action had been taken prior to placements being made i.e. rails around a balcony. The carers spoken to presented as committed, generous people who put the needs of children first. They spoke with affection, tolerance and understanding about the young people placed.

Matching principles were well known by the staff and they explained that the person within the agency that knows the carer best is always contacted prior to a placement going ahead. However, both carers and staff expressed concern that there is often not enough accurate information available from the Local Authorities to make good matching decisions in the first instance. The placements officer was spoken to and was clear about the ideal process, however, placements are made with limited information and occasionally this causes problems for the young person and the foster family. All placements are made on an initial trial basis and one carer spoken to said, 'after trying really hard for a few weeks it became obvious we were not for him', - he was able to ask the link worker to find another placement and went on to have a really successful further placement. In the questionnaires returned by carers a few mentioned that they had periods when they had 'empty rooms'. This was often because some young people are seen as needing 'lone placements' due to their complex needs. However, some conflict with carers regarding this decision was seen. Foster placement agreements and safe care agreements were seen on all of the files looked at. The foster placements seen during visits appeared well matched in terms of foster carers' skills and young people's needs. The young people were happy in their placements and one said, 'if I have to be anywhere I guess it might as well be here'. In the returned questionnaires young people were positive about their placements, saying: 'the family I am with are brilliant', 'I am being well looked after', 'the foster carers make me very happy' and 'I get on better away from home'. As an independent agency they are able to only accept the referrals of young people that they believe they can offer an appropriate placement to.

The carers' handbook includes procedures regarding child protection. Carers' files record any allegations made and the outcome of investigations. All carers spoken to understood the issues about keeping the young person safe and keeping themselves and their families safe. The prospective carer training covers child protection and further training is offered on an ongoing basis. The agency has dealt with instances of child prostitution, allegations of abuse by

carers and abuse instigated by young people. The records on file, and those sent to the Commission with the incident reports showed appropriate use of the child protection procedures. One of the carers visited had been the subject of an allegation that was found to be unsubstantiated. They spoke of the distress this caused, but also of their understanding of the need to investigate each allegation. Another carer visited had been abused herself by a young person. She spoke of the 'brilliant support' she received from the agency. This support enabled her to go on to take further placements. The young people who responded to the questionnaires felt any punishments given were appropriate. When asked if there were any punishments given that shouldn't be allowed one responded, 'Nope, I think it is fair'. There are clear procedures about reporting young people who go missing. These are well tested in all areas of the agency as many young people deal with conflict by absenting themselves. However, there were many examples of young people settling down in their foster homes and then greatly reducing the number of times they go missing. Foster parents were able to explain their efforts to help the young people understand the risks they are taking when they go missing.

The staff files looked at showed that appropriate recruitment processes had been used to ensure suitability to work with young people. Staff spoken to said they had completed an application form, provided personal references and had been interviewed prior to being offered a job. All staff had job descriptions and were well suited to the jobs they were doing. The files had checklists to ensure the appropriate checks had been taken up, these also had review dates on them to ensure they were up-dated. This was also true of the foster carers' files. Copies of qualifications are kept on file along with interview notes, letters offering employment etc. There are a number of fee-paid social workers who undertake the foster carers' assessments for Panel. The member of staff responsible for recruiting and supervising these people was interviewed during the inspection and confirmed that the same recruitment process and standards are used for Form F writers. They are all qualified social workers. All of the staff spoken to were qualified and appropriately experienced for the job they are doing.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 13 and 31.

The agency attempts to provide a diverse range of foster carers to meet young people's needs. Educational achievement is promoted and supported by the agency. Although it does not provide a respite service to parents, the agency provides respite placements to support the main carers of the young person.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has an equal opportunities policy and values diversity. They have recruited carers with a range of experiences and backgrounds. When matching a placement with a carer they take into account religion, culture, gender, language and race. Three of the young people currently placed in the region are of black or ethnic minority origin. When a trans-racial placement is being considered the Director, or Assistant Director has to be in agreement. One of the carers visited has mixed parentage and encourages the young people fostered to visit and understand her cultural background. Young people with disability are placed with carers who understand their particular needs. Where matching has obvious gaps the social worker and the carers work together to try to fill these gaps. Pride in, and understanding of the young person's background is encouraged. As many of the young people are placed outside of their home area the agency is keen to maintain meaningful contacts with families and friends where possible. Carers visited were aware of the possible stigma of being a looked after child and talked of the ways in which they advocated on the young people's behalf. They also worked with the young people to challenge any discrimination shown as a result of their situation. The agency has a Black Workers forum that focuses on support for black workers,

children and carers. It also celebrates diversity i.e. Celebration of Black History month.

The educational attainment of young people is a priority within the agency. The agency tries to ensure an educational package is available to young people from the outset of the placement. They employ two education liaison officers, one of them a senior, ex-head teacher who works with schools and education departments to arrange the best package possible for the young person. The education liaison officers provide training courses for carers to assist them in their role of supporting young people in education. FCA (South) uses part of its education budget to provide study aides and subject/revision guides to Year 11 pupils. They also work closely with the Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) to secure tutoring by accessing local authority funding. An Achievement Evening Award Presentation is an annual event where young people's achievements are celebrated. In two of the homes visited the young people were keen to show the photos and certificates relating to this event. There was evidence in most of the placements seen of progress in education. One young person had been out of mainstream school for many years and had been gradually re-introduced until he was able to attend full-time and discharge the special helper who had been put in to support him. He and his carers were rightly proud of his achievement. However, carers were also spoken to who had experience of caring for young people with no formal education experience for many months. Sometimes this was due to the young person refusing to attend, but sometimes because there was no school available. In these circumstances the stress on the carers was great as they had the young person with them the majority of the time. Some carers were able to advocate on the young person's behalf and demand education be provided by the local authority, others relied on the education liaison officers, link workers and resource workers to put together a part-time package. There was some evidence that local authorities were unhappy about FCA bringing children into their area with major education needs but without the resources to provide an education service. One carer said, 'FCA really need their own school'. On balance, the agency offers more to young people who are out of school than many services, with 84 young people (out of 87 placed) having school places established.

The agency does not often provide respite placements direct to parents, but has recruited respite carers to offer respite to foster carers. Where this is happening it is greatly appreciated by the carers, and often the young person. In some circumstances the carer's own family have been assessed to be respite carers for the young person. In respite placements the role and importance of the main carer is understood and close communication is encouraged between the two sets of carers. Carers spoken to, particularly carers of young people with severe disabilities, said that without respite care they would find caring long term for the young people almost impossible. It was said that the new rules about having to be fully assessed as a foster carer,

if providing respite, has made it much more difficult to access necessary breaks. The service is aware of this situation and has identified the need to recruit more respite carers as part of their business plan for 2006.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11.

The agency promotes contact arrangements for the young people and foster carers are involved in setting up and supporting such contact. Consultation with carers and young people is frequent and used to develop the service.

EVIDENCE:

There is an expectation by the agency that contact with family and friends will be promoted. Foster carers confirmed that this was made clear to them during the preparation training and all carers spoken to said they would support contact. In the placements seen all of the young people had some type of contact with their families. One carer said she spent 'most of the Christmas period on the road, transporting one or the other young person to their family'. Carers said they enjoy getting to know the young person's family as it helps them understand the young person. The completed questionnaires from carers all demonstrated they had contact with the family. They support contact by 'driving them to the contact (in Luton), buy presents and cards for siblings etc.' The young people spoken to had a range of views about their families, but most really appreciated the foster carers including their family on special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. A great deal of generosity was evidenced by foster carers, some of whom opened their homes to the young person's parents and siblings on a regular basis. Young people demonstrated that, regardless of the quality of foster placement, many would prefer to be back with their parents. Carers understood this and did not put themselves in competition with the parents.

The agency has a policy on consulting young people and it is a clear expectation of both carers and staff. The agency has set up a network of children's forums to give them a voice and allow them to influence the service.

Young people said they had 'more than enough' post relating to the service, but appreciated the activities set up for young people which staff also attended. The questionnaires completed all said they were 'listened to' and felt there were people who were interested in their views within the agency. They were less confident that the local authority social workers were interested in their views and one wrote 'I've only seen the social worker once in 4 months'. In situations like this there was evidence that the agency link workers had tried to involve the Local Authority social worker, with varying levels of success. This can lead to conflict between the agency and the Local Authority, particularly when placement decisions have been made by the Local Authority that do not appear to the young person, or the agency, to be in the young person's best interests. Following the last inspection further attempts to involve advocacy services for the young person have been made and have proved successful in some cases. Carers and staff have also gained confidence in challenging the Local Authority decisions when conflicts have arisen. Young people said they are aware of how to make complaints and would do so through the link worker. In reality few formal complaints are made by the young people placed.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14 and 29.

The agency has set up a leaving care project to help prepare young people for adulthood. Carers said their allowances and expenses are paid on time. They feel the allowances are generous but would be helped if a retainer was paid between placements.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has launched a range of Leaving Care services including: supported independent accommodation, supported lodgings and a support service for young people living in the community. The staff member recently appointed to run the service in the South has a great deal of experience working with young people and has a developed knowledge about the needs of young people leaving care. The plan is that all young people will have a pathway plan to help them move into independence. The leaving care services are available for Local Authorities to buy for existing placements as well as new ones. The accommodation will be arranged by Foster Care Associates in association with a local property management company (ASRA). It has the potential to be a valued service for young people in the 'Looked After' system. It is acknowledged that many young people will wish to leave care before they are competent to do so. The agency aims to support them in 'trying to become independent' and hopes local authorities will fund them through the 'trial and error' stage of independence. Some of the foster homes visited were planning on caring for the young person post 16 years and had ideas about how to prepare them for independence, however the agreement for such placements rest with the purchasing Local Authority who often see continued placement in foster homes as a too expensive option.

Carers said they have their fees and allowances paid regularly and with no mistakes. They are clear about what the fees cover and do not spend time and energy having to convince the managers that they need more money. However, the lack of payment during breaks in placement was an issue of concern for many, some of whom were single carers who had given up their jobs to foster for the agency. This means that when a placement ends they are without any income until the next placement is arranged. Carers said a small retainer would make a huge difference. However, in common with other agencies, the agency does not get any payment from local authorities once the placement has ended. They therefore do not feel they are in a position to pay for an empty placement. This issue may need to be re-addressed if retention of carers becomes an area of concern. Some carers expressed unease about the agency being a profit making company, especially when financial incentives to introduce prospective carers are paid. However, they also acknowledged that they enjoyed the benefits a 'paying agency' were able to provide to the carers.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster 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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

17, 19, 21,24 and 27.

The staff are appropriately experienced and qualified for their tasks. A number have recently resigned so staffing numbers are being reviewed. The training offered is felt to be effective, but there are some concerns about the future of training provision. There is a clear strategy for working with carers who say they are well supported. The children's case records are thorough and up-to-date. The service is financially secure, although some review of spending is taking place.

EVIDENCE:

The evidence seen at the inspection, including the feedback from carers, pointed towards there being sufficient staff to provide a good service to carers and young people. However, in discussion with staff it became clear that there is some anxiety about the number of staff who have recently left or resigned from the service. Foster Care Associates (South) has been reviewing their position in the light of demand for the service, and a small minority of the posts are likely to be un-filled. The manager explained this does not represent a cut in staff, but is in response to fewer carers/placements. However, this comes at a time when there have been a number of carers moving to another local agency, and this has added to the anxiety felt by the staff. Two senior managers are also about to leave – their positions will be filled by seconding other senior managers of the agency into those roles. This, it is hoped, will provide immediate cover and continuity in the short term. However, some staff feel that having short-term arrangements will lead to further anxiety and feelings of loss and said that they feel 'let down' by this plan. It is recommended that managers take time to explain openly to the staff group the rationale behind the plans for the future and give staff the opportunity to express their concerns about these. The recruitment of carers continues, with a mixed response across the region. In the main the number of carers haven't varied greatly since last year. However, there have been a number of valued carers who have left the service and been approved as carers for another local agency. This has added to the feelings of anxiety mentioned above. The assessments of carers seen were thorough and covered all the areas required by the standards.

Training offered to carers was said in the questionnaires to be 'good and frequent'. This included preparation training prior to assessment and further training courses offered following approval. However, a few carers also said that the training courses had been cancelled at short notice, leaving them feeling frustrated and angry. During the inspection one of the area offices was delivering a training course to just two carers as a result of illness of carers and/or young people. The manager explained that it is difficult to know whether to go ahead when so many people drop out at the last minute and understood that sometimes the decision to cancel is an unpopular one. Carers, at the inspection spoke very positively about the content of the training, and one said that he had 'learnt a great deal' from the courses and the contact with other carers. Staff training was an issue of concern for some staff who felt the expectation that training would be provided by social workers rather than experienced trainers undermined the value of the training. The same view was expressed about the process of cascading learning to others. However, other staff spoken to said they had all the training opportunities they require and were supported to undertake further training of their choice. The training records seen showed that the service offers appropriate and frequent training

to both staff and carers. Whilst this meets the standards it would be useful for the service to consult with staff regarding their training expectations.

There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. Carers said they were made aware of this prior to the assessment process. It is also clearly set out in the carers' agreement. There were some issues raised by carers living in areas that are some distance from the area offices as they feel that they are less accessible to the support staff. Some said they would like to have an office closer to them. However, the vast majority of the carers spoken to, and those who responded to the questionnaires, said the support 'could not be faulted'. This was said across the region. The role of the support workers include direct contact with the young people and day to day help in managing and planning. This was much appreciated by the carers. Records showed that the support workers regularly communicated with the placing agency social workers, although the success of this communication was varied.

Young people's files were sampled in each area office. They contained the necessary information to make decisions about the placement of the young people. The files include the following: referral form (some of this information was scant, although there was evidence of efforts being made to gain the information), agreement to activities signed by those with parental responsibility, contracts with Local Authorities and the fees to be paid to the carers, placement agreements, contact arrangements, weekly records from carers, reviews and education liaison meetings. The information seen was clearly written and up-to-date.

The service is financially secure. Although there has been some downturn in the referrals made to this branch, the rest of the Agency is still growing in numbers. There are corporate financial processes and the audited accounts evidence financial viability. In order to remain competitive in the current local market, the service has looked at the fee structure and are re-developing their packages for local authorities. This branch has had to make decisions about the best use of their local available resources and one of the decisions made in this context was the closing of the Poole area office. Whilst the director was able to demonstrate a good rationale for this decision, it added to staff anxiety about the future of the service. The director was clear that there was no worry about the financial situation of the agency but has had to be realistic about the changing demand for the service.

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	4
8	3
9	3
15	4
30	X

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

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.	FS17	Recommend that senior managers openly share their rationale for the filling (or non-filling) of empty posts and allow staff to voice their concerns.
2.	FS19	Recommend that the service consult with staff about their expectations and views about the training programme.
3.	FS29	Recommend that the service re-consider paying retainers to carers between placements.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight
Ground Floor
Mill Court
Furrlongs
Newport, IOW
PO30 2AA

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI