

# Poole Fostering and Placements Services

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The Borough of Poole's fostering service is managed within the Borough's Children and Families Services structure. There is a Principal Manager and a Team Manager responsible for the mainstream fostering team. The Shared Care Scheme is located within the Children's Health and Disability Team, which is staffed separately. The two teams have responsibility for the recruitment, assessment, training and support to all of the Borough's foster carers and shared care families.

The range of services set out in the Statement of Purpose are as follows:

Short term care to support families through crisis, family breakdown or in an emergency to protect a child from harm.

Permanent substitute family care through adoption or long term fostering, for children who cannot return to their birth family.

A shared care service providing respite day and overnight care for children with disabilities.

The fostering service is supported with input from professionals such as the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, Clinical Psychologists, the Intensive Support Team for Children and Young People and Designated Teachers.

## Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This service was last inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in October 2006. The actions and recommendations made at the previous inspection have all been acted upon and resolved satisfactorily.

Two inspectors carried out this inspection over a three day period. The purpose of this inspection was to assess the performance of the service against the key National Minimum Standards and fostering regulations. This was achieved through interviews and discussions with members of the fostering team, senior management and key professionals such as the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children and the Clinical Psychologists. Discussions also took place with a group of young people in foster care and two groups of foster carers. One of whom is the independent foster carer support group known as "The Voice". Visits were made to four foster homes and a range of records and documents were examined.

Significant improvements are being made to develop current practice and to achieve the best outcomes for young people in foster care. Foster carers describe the service as being very good, supportive and excellent. It was also described as being modern and forward thinking. Foster carers spoke very positively about the support they

receive from the fostering service. Foster carers were of the opinion that the support from child care teams was not always as good. This according to foster carers was due to staff shortages. Children and young people spoke very positively about the quality of care they receive. Children and young people indicated that they were happy and safe in this foster homes. They are pleased that the Borough of Poole is interested in their opinions. This includes the invitations they receive to attend corporate events. However, some are of the opinion that there is a lack of activities for the older age group. For example, combined social events for younger and older children are not always appreciated.

The Borough of Poole fostering service demonstrates good outcomes for children and young people in foster placements. There is a strong emphasis for ensuring that foster placements are suitable, safe and fulfilling for children and young people. Robust management systems are in place to demonstrate the effectiveness of how young people, foster carers and staff are supported. Some of these systems are still being developed.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection, six actions and 11 recommendations were made. Since the last inspection the fostering service has made a number of improvements and worked hard to build on better outcomes for young people. As a result, there are no actions outstanding.

Recruitment procedures are more vigorous which now includes written evidence of how potential applicants are vetted. For example, documenting follow up work undertaken regarding an applicant's previous employment.

More stringent strategies are now in place to recruit foster carers who can offer long term foster placements.

Communication between the fostering service and the child care social work teams is improving to ensure that as far as possible, foster carers are given the relevant information to enable them to provide the appropriate care. This includes the implementation of risk management plans.

Risk management procedures are now in place to clarify the use of permissible forms of control such as environmental restraint.

File audits are now in place to ensure that correct information is entered on to foster carers' files.

A more robust system is now in place to ensure that a foster carer's terms of approval are consistent with a proposed placement.

A substantial amount of work has been undertaken to address the recommendations made at the last inspection as follows:

Health and safety checks are being carried out and reviewed annually.

Young people now benefit from matching and placement meetings which are more consistent.

A review of the child protection procedures and safe caring policies has been instigated. This process now ensures that safe caring plans are in place for foster homes.

On-going work is in place to review and improve consultation with young people.

There have been vast improvements with ways in which young people's health needs are assessed and recorded. This process is still under review.

The opportunities for contact between foster carers and the education team has strengthened. This is proving to have a positive impact on young people's attendance at school and education attainment.

Telephone calls are now made to verify references received for new staff, thus ensuring a safer recruitment process.

A recruitment strategy is now in place to recruit a better range of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people and to offer a better selection of placement choice.

A review of the procedures with regards to responding to allegations or concerns raised about foster carers has been carried out. This was done in consultation with foster carers. The procedures regarding concerns about quality of care by foster carers are much clearer.

Resources are provided to enable foster carers to retain information and memorabilia for life story work.

Revised procedures are in place to ensure that complaints and serious incidents are recorded with clear evidence of conclusions reached and any action taken.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are promoted through a broad range of initiatives. For example, young people are fully consulted on their health assessments. This includes young people's contributions to their health assessments. These assessment procedures are currently under review via the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children. Effective communication systems are in place between the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, the fostering service and foster carers. This includes the availability of the Nurse at team meetings and placement meetings.

Young people and foster carers benefit from health related services and resources

which are well established and being developed. For example, the allocated time for the Clinical Psychologists has increased over the last year. This enables the Clinical Psychologists to provide specialist training for foster carers on topics such as attachment, positive play and resilience. Foster carers are extremely positive about the benefit of this training. The Clinical Psychologists are accessible to meeting the needs of individual children and young people. This is a proactive service which is of great value to sustaining children and young people's placements. The same applies to the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, whose allocated time to the fostering service is increasing this year.

There are incentives in place to encourage and support young people to maintain healthy lifestyles. This takes into account, diet, sport and recreation. The fostering service ensures that young people also have access to primary health care services such as registration with a doctor, dentist and optician. Foster carers are very efficient in identifying these services with young people.

New initiatives are being developed to improve services for holistic health such as mental health, emotional health and coping with trauma.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The Principal Manager and the Team Manager possess a wealth of relevant experience and hold relevant professional qualifications. These are proportionate with the role of managing the service effectively and safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.

Young people's welfare is protected through a more effective recruitment process. Policies and procedures are more thorough. This is evidenced through good quality records. Young people and foster carers now benefit from more effective communication systems between teams of professionals. This is as a result of the restructuring of the social care unit.

The fostering service is committed to ensuring young people's safety. This includes a consistent approach towards ensuring the suitability of foster homes. Thorough monitoring of suitable foster homes is in place. This includes input from Fire Officers and Independent Reviewing Officers. The fostering service is proactive in providing foster carers with information, guidance and training on aspects of health and safety. This is also included in the foster carers' manual. Four foster homes visited by inspectors were well furnished, comfortable and pleasantly decorated. All foster homes were maintained to a good standard of cleanliness. Comments received from young people about the quality of care and standards of living were very positive. Foster carers demonstrated that they are highly skilled and experienced and work well with the fostering service to ensure the best outcomes for the young people entrusted to their care.

A significant review of the matching processes has been undertaken. There are very

clear examples of how this aspect of the service has developed. Evidence of all placements made are more consistent and detailed. There is a more effective system in place for matching young people with foster carers approved by Independent Foster Agencies. The number of young people placed with Independent Foster Agencies is relatively low. Contact with young people placed with Independent Foster Agencies is regular. This includes visits from Independent Reviewing Officers and members of the fostering team. Young people described their experience of being introduced to their foster families as being positive. Introductory visits are variable and are dependent on the assessed needs of the young person.

Children and young people's well being and safety is a high priority throughout the borough and the fostering service. Children and young people are protected from potential harm and abuse through effective management of child protection and safeguarding systems. Effective procedures are in place to build on current practice and for introducing new safeguarding initiatives. For example, the policies and procedures on responding to allegations made against foster carers has been revised and updated. This was done in consultation with the independent foster carers group known as 'The Voice'. The Borough of Poole has also launched the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Staying Safe action plan.

There are rigorous checks in place for ensuring that staff, foster carers and significant others are safe and suitable for working with children and young people. This includes enhanced checks which are carried out on individuals through the Criminal Records Bureau.

Safe caring plans are in place for all foster households. These are reviewed regularly. Foster carers spoke very positively about the improvements of the training opportunities, this includes training on child protection, anti-bullying practices and behaviour management.

An observation of the fostering panel indicated that it is effective in its operation. The fostering panel is correctly constituted and made up of members with relevant experience and expertise. The panel undertakes a robust quality assurance process. Communication between the panel chair person and senior management such as the panel advisor and decision maker is consistent. Outcomes of panel meetings are clear and well written.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The demographic make up of the area in which the fostering service operates is largely white. However, sound and robust policies and procedures are in place to promote equal opportunities and diversity. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the diverse needs of all children and young people are considered. For example, an equalities action plan is in place. An equality impact assessment screening process and action plan are in place for the recruitment of foster carers. The assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough, thus ensuring that they are able to meet

children/young people's individual needs. The Spirituality Worker provides a valued service which enables children and young people to identify with their beliefs, wishes and preferences such as attachment issues, faith, emotional well being and resilience.

The service positively encourages children and young people to attend school or alternate education provisions. The overall results of young people's education attainments are exceptionally high. There is a clear expectation that the borough, the fostering service and foster carers will actively promote educational attainment. There are relevant training and learning opportunities available to foster carers and professionals. The percentage of school placements and attendance for children and young people in foster care is very high. There are innovative projects and new initiatives in place to support this commitment. For example, a home work club is run by a designated teacher appointed to children and young people in foster care. A Children Looked After - Enjoy and Achieve Planning Group is now in place. One of the key tasks for this group is to assess and evaluate the accessibility of good quality education and training opportunities for care leavers. This group will liaise with the Children Looked After - Healthy Partnership Group and Corporate Parenting Group.

An annual awards ceremony is hosted by the borough to celebrate children and young people's achievements. This is a popular event and well received by young people.

Short break foster carers work closely with parents and others with parental responsibility to ensure that care is provided consistently. Although suitable accommodation can be a limiting factor when providing care for children with physical disabilities, established provisions are well equipped and suitable. Good training is available for foster carers working with children and young people with disabilities. There are comprehensive procedures in place for recruiting, assessing, reviewing and monitoring short break foster carers. Short break foster carers demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that children and young people's experience away from home is positive and fulfilling. Short break foster carers describe their experience of the fostering service and the children's Health and Disabilities Team as being extremely helpful and readily available to assist at any time.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

There are sound procedures in place for managing contact arrangements. This includes the clear recording of agreements and outcomes of contact visits. Children and young people receive good support to have contact with their families and significant others where this is appropriate. Challenges and sensitive matters are managed effectively and promptly. Procedural guidance on supporting contact arrangements are clearly set out in the foster carers' manual. Additional training and direct support is also available to foster carers. Advanced training on contact for children in care is scheduled this year for foster carers.

There are very good examples of how the service has developed and continues to explore more effective methods for consulting with children and young people. Children and young people are encouraged to contribute to their reviews and their foster carers' reviews. The involvement of the Independent Reviewing Officers promotes consistency and effectiveness when consulting with children and young people. Adequate time is allocated to ensuring that when necessary, Independent Reviewing Officers can approach young people at a time and pace which is suitable to them. Methods of consulting with young people is under review. The borough and the fostering service demonstrates its commitment to listening and acting on the views of children and young people in a number of ways. The corporate parenting committee is effective in facilitating opportunities to meet with children and young people. A workshop was presented by young people to an audience of senior management and the corporate parenting committee last year. The outcomes of this workshop were positive and encouraging. In turn, the views of young people are being addressed in a working document. The children and young people's plan for the Borough of Poole 2006 - 2009 is into its second year. Young people were consulted when this plan was devised.

Foster households are provided with computers for use by young people. A monthly remuneration is paid to each household for subscriptions to broad band and disposals such as printing matter. Young people are of the opinion that there are not enough activities within the borough for the older age group. A steering group has been established to evaluate and monitor the provisions for young people in foster care. The views of young people are also taken into account through various consultation groups.

Alternate methods are still being explored for consulting with children and young people with profound communication difficulties.

An external service has been commissioned to provide an advocacy service for children and young people. All children and young people are aware of this service. The current percentage of interest from young people is very low. Young people advised the inspectors that they would feel comfortable in talking to their foster carers or social worker if they had any concerns. Details of the complaints procedure are included in the information pack which is given to children and young people at the start of their foster placement.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

There is a dedicated team known as the Pathway Team for managing the processes for young people moving on to semi or independent living. There are effective management systems in place for working with the Pathway Team for ensuring that young people's assessed needs are being met. This includes input from the Manager of the Pathway Team who contributes to the 'skills to foster' (pre approval) training. A Supported Lodgings worker is based in the Pathway Team. Foster carers have access to enhanced levels of support and guidance for managing pathway plans with

young people. The fostering service is proactive in facilitating additional training for foster carers supporting young people who are preparing to move on to semi or independent living. For example, a one day course titled 'Preparation for adulthood' is being arranged for foster carers this year.

The management and processing of foster carers' allowances are well established. Robust procedural guidance on the payment of foster care fees and allowances for the period 2007 - 2008 is in place. Procedures are in place for ensuring that funds are available for special events such as birthdays and holidays.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

A Statement of Purpose is in place which clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the service. This document is subject to periodic review. A guide and information pack is given to all children and young people at the start of their foster placement. The guide was written in consultation with young people.

The service is very well managed. Leadership is strong and effective. There are very clear lines of accountability and responsibility in place. Communication between management and the staff is transparent. Staff have adapted to the revised staffing structure. The revised structure has improved morale within the team. Workloads and caseloads are more manageable and all staff are suitably qualified and experienced. The effectiveness of working relationships between the teams helps to promote good outcomes for children and young people. Operational systems such as supervision and appraisals are consistent.

Strategies for the recruitment of foster carers have been reviewed. These strategies are underpinned by a comprehensive policy and procedures. Evidence of a recent recruitment campaign clearly indicates the methods used for raising the awareness of fostering for the Borough of Poole and attracting potential foster carers. Thorough processes are in place for assessing and training potential foster carers. Vigorous processes are in place for vetting potential foster carers and others with whom they are associated with. There have been vast improvements and developments with the delivery of the training programme for foster carers. Foster carers are offered opportunities to attend national training events. Foster carers describe all aspects of training as being excellent. Exit interviews are conducted when foster carers tender their resignations.

Foster carers are provided with very good support and management. Overall, foster carers are generally satisfied with the support they receive from the fostering service. Foster carers have established informal networks amongst themselves. There are mixed views about the expectations and support received from the Pan - Dorset out of hours service. There are proposals to develop a more localised support service in the form of a 'buddy scheme'. The proposals of this service and views of foster carers from two separate meetings were inconsistent. The independent foster carer support group known as 'The Voice' meet regularly. The group is fully

supported by the fostering service. For example, senior management are invited to attend group meetings to focus on specific matters. The arrangements for foster carers' supervision and reviews are robust. Monthly supervisions include unannounced visits. Outcomes of supervisions are clearly documented. Foster carers reviews take place annually. These reviews are comprehensive and takes into account the views of others such as the children/young people being fostered and the child/young person's social worker.

All records for children and young people are now stored electronically. Other records including foster carers' files are increasingly being stored in this way. File auditing systems are in place. Files are maintained to a very high standard. These are effective and action is taken to address any shortfalls identified. The quality of foster carers' files such as assessments, supervision records and annual review records demonstrates the good skill mix and competency within the staff team. Statutory and organisational records contain all the required information. Management and monitoring systems are robust. Outcomes for young people are clearly evidenced through existing and new initiatives such as the Care Matters action plan, Safeguarding action plan, monitoring via the Children Looked After Resource panel, Corporate Parenting working group and input from the Children on the Edge of Care resource panel. A overarching quality assurance framework is in place.

There are thorough procedures in place for assessing, approving, supervising and reviewing family and friends as carers who are also known as kinship carers. The fostering service ensures that kinship carers receive the same quality of support and training opportunities as for mainstream foster carers. The service now ensures that kinship arrangements are being submitted to the panel within a six week period. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that all foster carers are clear about the proposals of the local support scheme. NMS 21
- ensure that all foster carers are clear about the provisions of the out of hours support currently provided by Pan - Dorset service. NMS 21