



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Reading Borough Council Fostering and Adoption Team

P O Bx 2624

Reading

RG1 7WB

5th –15th January 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Reading Borough Council Fostering Team

Address

P O Bx 2624, Reading, RG1 7WB

Local Authority Manager

Judith Russell

Tel No:

0118 9390900

Address

P O Bx 2624, Reading, RG1 7WB

Fax No:

0118 9553746

Email Address

Judith.Russell@reading.gov.uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NA

Date of last inspection

09/03/04

Date of Inspection Visit		5th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Maire Atherton	074456
Name of Inspector	2	Kerry Kingston	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Judith Russell	

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Inspection visits
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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings
(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Reading Borough Council Fostering and Adoption Team. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Reading Borough Council fostering service provides substitute family care to meet the needs of Reading children and young people who are looked after by the authority on either a short term/temporary or longer term/permanent basis. The service also supports children who continue to live within their family of origin by providing regular periods of family based care. To this end the service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers.

The fostering service offers:

- A general fostering scheme that provides planned and emergency short term, bridging, relief and longer-term task centred placements for children 0-16 years.
- A pool of Family and Friends foster carers, who provide short term and permanent placements to specific children, originating from their own extended families and networks.
- The fostering service recruits foster carers offering permanent placements.
- The Community Parent scheme provides fee paid emergency and short-term foster carers for the most challenging children and young people aged 8-16 years.
- Fee-paid foster carers are recruited to care for specific individual children and young people with complex needs on a task centred and long-term basis.
- The family link scheme provides children with disabilities with specialist family based day and overnight care to support them and their families.

(Taken from the statement of purpose for the fostering service.)

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This inspection took place over 5 inspection days. The inspectors met with the manager and assistant team managers of the service, a group of young people living with foster families, the children selected for case tracking and carers, some link workers and the children's social workers and one birth parent.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, foster children and placing authorities.

All standards were evaluated as met or partly met. There was evidence to indicate that the shortage of staff has had a considerable impact on the ability of the team to achieve the core tasks of the fostering service. Despite this the team were very positive in their outlook and were continuing to identify and promote areas of development for the service.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard was met.

The statement of purpose for Reading fostering service contains the information required by regulation.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

One of the standards was met, and the other almost met.

The manager of the service has the qualifications and experience outlined in the standard. The personnel files need to include all the information outlined in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Service Regulations. The personnel files of administrative staff working for the fostering service also need to meet the requirements of Schedule 1.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

Both standards were met.

There was evidence from discussion with foster carers, staff and managers of a clear knowledge of their respective roles and lines of accountability.

It was reported in the pre-inspection questionnaire and confirmed during the inspection that the financial systems were robust and clear financial information was provided for foster carers.

The manager demonstrated a thorough understanding of her role throughout the inspection and in the pre-inspection documentation received by the inspector.

There are two assistant team managers in post, one in an acting capacity to cover an identified shortfall, and both have specific responsibilities.

The department is being restructured and with effect from 1st April 2005 the fostering service (as part of the Children & Families stream) will be part of the new Directorate of Education

and Children's Services, DECS.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

Four of the nine standards were evaluated as met and the remainder were almost met. The foster homes seen were warm and comfortable. There was no evidence to indicate that all foster homes were inspected annually. The inspectors formed the view that a more robust approach to Health and Safety and space issues was needed. It is recommended that consideration be given to providing staff with more detailed guidance for assessing a foster home environment in respect of these issues.

The inspection process through the documentation provided, discussion with staff and observation of the panel and foster carers training evidenced a thorough approach to ensuring that diversity is valued and equality promoted

The manager informed the inspectors that work had been undertaken on the development of foster placement agreements. It is anticipated that this system will enable information to be brought together to avoid duplicating information required by differing formats.

There is a Safe Caring policy in place. This is predominantly a Health and Safety and medical model. It should be expanded to include child protection and be the basis for individual safer caring guidelines for each foster home.

Foster carers spoken with and the majority of those who responded to the questionnaire said that they were generally satisfied with the information available about the children at the time of placement.

There is a clear written policy on the promotion and management of contact between children and their families/friends. The previous report suggested that the practical arrangements relating to contact should be addressed by the service, the development of foster placement agreements should move this forward.

Some young people felt that they were listened to and their views taken into account through the 'Looked after Children' review system. Others stated clearly that they did not feel listened to, though it was noted that the role of the child's social worker and the young person's relationship with their social worker was key in the review process.

Some children receiving relief care were not included in the 'Looked after Children' review system and this should be addressed.

The inspectors noted that in the information for the annual review of foster carer's the views of children and young people in placement were not always sought. It is recommended that this be reviewed.

There is a 'Looked after Children' Health Advisor attached to the multi-agency support team. The records made by foster carers in relation to health issues and medication were seen to vary considerably. Some were robust and gave a clear picture while others contained insufficient information.

Children and young people spoken with reported feeling very well supported by foster carers in meeting their educational needs and gave the inspectors examples of how this happened in practice. The fostering service has different strategies to manage structured occupation for children and young people excluded from school

Young people spoken with said their respective carers encouraged them to develop the skills needed for independent living.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers. (Standards 15-23)

Seven of the nine standards were almost met and two were met.

There are clear recruitment and selection procedures in place. There was evidence that there has been difficulty in recruiting to vacant posts.

There was no evidence on the files seen that telephone enquiries were made in addition to the written references.

Workload management is a key feature of the service and is overseen by the senior management team; this was evidenced in discussion with the manager and the fostering service staff. There was evidence that the team continue to be stretched to meet the demands of the service.

Staff of the fostering service reported positive relationships with the children's social workers and vice versa.

There was considerable evidence that the fostering service and its management have adopted a flexible approach in their endeavours to recruit and retain staff.

There was evidence that the shortfall of staff in post prevented the fostering service from meeting all the identified needs.

The manager said that the service is successful in recruiting prospective foster carers.

There is a clear competency based assessment process in place. Prospective foster carers spoken with reported a significant delay (more than six months) between contacting the fostering service and being offered a place on the preparation group training.

There is an out of hours support line run by carers for carers which runs from 5pm to midnight each weekday and 9am to midnight at weekends. This is in addition to the Berkshire wide out of hours emergency duty team.

The inspectors were made aware of a number of carers who do not have an allocated link worker. It was reported that the fostering service duty team managed support to these carers by means of regular telephone calls. It was acknowledged that this was less than satisfactory and it was hoped that the shortfall would be made good with the appointment to the consultant practitioner post.

There was evidence of a good range of training courses available to fostering staff and carers, both in-house and external. Training is positively encouraged and supported. All those spoken with viewed supervision positively. The informal support networks in the team were reported to be robust.

The fostering service had taken the decision that all overdue reviews should be brought to panel, and this was the case with the reviews observed during the inspection of the panel. On the sample of foster carer files seen there were foster care agreements in place. At the time of this visit all link workers were qualified social workers.

The panel chair highlighted the fact that unannounced visits were not happening in all cases and this will continue to be monitored by the panel.

There was evidence from one carer that in the absence of a link worker payments may not be made on time, particularly in respect of relief care placements. Family Link carers have a different system for payment and this was said to work well.

The fostering service has a clear commitment to provide a range training opportunities and support groups for carers. It is strongly advised that the availability of foster carers be determined so that courses can be timed to maximise attendance.

An area identified for development by the fostering service is the provision of support for the children of families who foster. This would be much appreciated by the foster carers.

Records (Standards 24-25)

One standard was evaluated as met and the other partly met.

Some of the records made by foster carer provided a clear pen picture of children and significant events and developments; others provided little or no information. In one case this had been identified as an area for discussion with the carer. The foster carers forward monthly summaries to their link worker and the link worker sends them on to the child's social worker. In the absence of a link worker there is no system in place for dispersal of information, it is strongly advised that this be reviewed.

The inspectors noted that allegations and complaints about carers were clearly recorded on

the carers file in a separate section.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

This standard was met.

The fostering service team is located in large purpose built council offices.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

Only one standard is applicable to this fostering service and this standard was met.

There is clear information provided to foster carers about the allowance schedule. The fostering service operates a specialist scheme with fee paid carers for hard to place children and young people.

The service pays all its carers above the Fostering Network recommended rates; there is a reward element in the scheme.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard was assessed as partly met.

Since the last inspection a new panel chair had been appointed and a new vice chair was proposed at the panel meeting attended by the inspectors. In discussion with the panel chair the inspectors advised that a review of the membership of the panel be undertaken. At the feedback at the end of the inspection the inspectors were informed that the review had taken place. It is strongly advised that the newly constituted panel receive training in the policies and procedures about the handling of their functions.

The panel chair had noted that foster carers did not routinely attend panel for their review and this area was to be addressed.

Short term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was assessed as met.

The Family Link scheme has maintained a discrete identity whilst forming part of the fostering service. The recruitment of carers would benefit from further development. The staffing establishment for the service would also need to be reviewed in line with an increase in the number of assessments and carers to support.

Family and friends as carers(Standard 32)

This standard was evaluated as met.

There was evidence that this an area of growth and development for the fostering service.

The manager reported that the specialist post had given an improved focus to this area of work and the particular needs of this group of carers. A support group for family and friends carers has been set up.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

YES

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

As outlined in the requirements and recommendation section of this report.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Maire Atherton</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Kerry Kingston</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	<u>25/01/05</u>		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	34(3) Schedule 6	FS13FS10 FS8	Foster Placement Agreements are to be in place. (Previous timescale of 01/09/04)	15/08/05
2	37(3)	FS22	Visits to be made to any child in foster placement in accordance with this regulation. (Within timescale from previous report)	1/03/05
3	20(3)(d)	FS3	All personnel files are to include a recent photograph and copies of relevant professional qualifications. Written evidence that any gaps in employment history have been satisfactorily explained must be available on personnel files.	31/03/05
4	29(b)(ii)	FS11	A method for routinely obtaining the views of foster children for the carer's annual review is to be developed.	30/04/05
5	15(1)(2)	FS12	Foster carers records need to evidence how children's health care needs have been addressed.	28/02/04

6	19	FS17	A review of the staffing levels of the fostering service is to be undertaken to ensure that all areas (family and friends, family link and main stream) have sufficient staff to enable them to meet the identified needs of the fostering service.	31/03/05
7	29(2)	FS21	Reviews are to take place at intervals of not more than a year.	30/04/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	An additional Reading fostering service leaflet should be devised to meet the needs of different groups of children.
2	FS6	Staff should be provided with more detailed guidance for assessing a foster home environment, to demonstrate a robust approach to Health and Safety and space issues.
3	FS9	The Safe Caring policy should be expanded to include child protection and be the basis for individual safer caring guidelines for each foster home. (Standard 9.3)
4	FS11	Children receiving relief care should be included in the 'Looked after Children' review system.
5	FS15	Telephone enquiries made of referees should be recorded on personnel file.
6	FS16	Carers should be supported and encouraged to maintain a training portfolio.
7	FS22	There should be at least one unannounced visit each year.
8	FS24	The fostering service should ensure that carers store information in a secure manner.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent 7

Survey of placing authorities YES

Foster carer survey YES

Foster children survey YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals YES

- Directors of Social services NO

- Child protection officer YES

- Specialist advisor (s) YES

- Local Foster Care Association NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements YES

- Interview with children YES

- Interview with foster carers YES

- Interview with agency staff YES

- Contact with parents YES

- Contact with supervising social workers YES

- Examination of files YES

Individual interview with manager YES

Information from provider YES

Individual interviews with key staff YES

Group discussion with staff NO

Interview with panel chair YES

Observation of foster carer training YES

Observation of foster panel YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents YES

Inspection of records YES

Interview with individual child YES

Date of Inspection 05/01/05

Time of Inspection 10.00

Duration Of Inspection (hrs) 78

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- **There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.**

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The statement of purpose for Reading fostering service contains the information required by regulation. The elected members approved the current statement of purpose in October 2004. It is advised that the time period to which the included data relates is specified in the document.

As at the time of the last inspection it remained the case that children, young people and foster carers could not recall seeing the Children's information material provided by the fostering service. A system has been established for recording documents that children and carers have received, as recommended in the previous report. It is advised that time be spent with foster carers going through the information provided. It is recommended that an additional Reading fostering service leaflet be devised to meet the needs of different groups of children.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The manager of the service has the qualifications and experience outlined in the standard.

At the time of this visit there were two assistant team managers in post, one in an acting capacity to cover for an identified shortfall.

Team members spoken with were confident in the management of the team.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Not all of the personnel files seen contained a recent photograph as required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Copies of relevant professional qualification certificates were not held on all files seen.

Written evidence that any gaps in employment history have been satisfactorily explained must be available on personnel files.

Administrative staff working for the fostering service need to undergo the same checks as social work staff and have all the information outlined in Schedule 1 on their personnel files. It was understood that this process was underway at the time of this visit.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence from discussion with foster carers, staff and managers of a clear knowledge of their respective roles and lines of accountability.

It was reported in the pre-inspection questionnaire that the financial systems were robust and clear financial information was provided for foster carers. Carers spoken with confirmed this.

The manager outlined a range of measures that are in place to monitor the performance of the fostering service.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The manager demonstrated a thorough understanding of her role throughout the inspection and in the pre-inspection documentation received by the inspector.

There are two assistant team managers in post, one in an acting capacity to cover an identified shortfall, and both have specific responsibilities.

At the time of this visit the fostering service was part of the Children & Families stream of Reading Borough Council's Social Services and Housing Directorate. The department is being restructured and with effect from 1st April 2005 the fostering service (as part of the Children & Families stream) will be part of the new Directorate of Education and Children's Services, DECS. It may be that this will result in some changes to the manager's line of accountability.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The foster homes seen were warm and comfortable. There was no evidence to indicate that all foster homes were inspected annually. The inspectors formed the view that a more robust approach to Health and Safety and space issues was needed. It is recommended that consideration be given to providing staff with more detailed guidance for assessing a foster home environment in respect of these issues.

There was evidence that the fostering service had asked carers who transported children and young people to provide copies of their driving licences and insurance details. These were seen on the sample of files inspected.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspection process through the documentation provided, discussion with staff and observation of the panel and foster carers training evidenced a thorough approach to ensuring that diversity is valued and equality promoted. It continues to be the case that resources are limited for making appropriate matches for all the immediate/short term placements.

There was evidence seen in one foster home visited where appropriate software had been provided to enable a child to use a computer.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There was evidence that although general recruitment is successful there is an ongoing difficulty in providing appropriate matches for teenagers and older children with special needs.

Carers, children and a birth family involved in relief or family link care spoke positively about the opportunity for introductory visits and how valuable these had been in establishing positive relationships.

The manager informed the inspectors that work had been undertaken on the development of foster placement agreements, as required by the last two inspection reports. A new computerised record system is due to be introduced to the Children and Families Teams. It is anticipated that this system will enable information to be brought together to avoid duplicating information required by differing formats, such as the 'Looked after Children' Placement Plans Parts 1 and 2 and foster placement agreements.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There are comprehensive child protection procedures in place. There was evidence that despite child protection forming part of the post approval core training not all carers had received up to date child protection training, particularly carers who have been approved for a number of years.

There is a Safe Caring policy in place. This is predominantly a Health and Safety and medical model. It should be expanded to include child protection and be the basis for individual safer caring guidelines for each foster home.

There is clear written information provided for carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable.

There are management systems in place to collate and evaluate any child protection issues raised in foster care. A system for recording any instances of bullying has been introduced.

Foster carers spoken with and the majority of those who responded to the questionnaire said that they were generally satisfied with the information available about the children at the time of placement. Where the information was lacking the carers indicated that it was usually due to circumstances outside the control of the child's social worker, rather than the suppression of relevant information.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There is a clear written policy on the promotion and management of contact between children and their families/friends. This is supported by a Fostering Network leaflet on 'Contact', provided to carers with the fostering service handbook.

Children spoken with felt well supported in maintaining contact where this was possible. Foster carers outlined occasional difficulties in the contact arrangements, particularly about not being informed about last minute changes. A carer reported that one contact had not been supervised and this had caused some concern. The previous report suggested that the practical arrangements relating to contact should be addressed by the service, the development of foster placement agreements should move this forward.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There was some variation in the response of children and young people spoken with. Some felt that they were listened to and their views taken into account through the 'Looked after Children' review system. Others stated clearly that they did not feel listened to, though it was noted that the role of the child's social worker and the young person's relationship with their social worker was key in the review process. To facilitate communication the service may use Viewpoint to obtain young service users' views.

Some children who were receiving relief care were not included in the 'Looked after Children' review system and this should be addressed.

The inspectors noted that in the information for the annual review of foster carer's the views of children and young people in placement were not always sought. It is recommended that this be reviewed.

The children and young people spoken with and those who responded to the questionnaire said that they had been given information on how to complain.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

There is a 'Looked after Children' Health Advisor attached to the multi-agency support team. The post holder informed inspectors that she has written articles for the carers' newsletter. The post holder reported that it was proving difficult to become an established part of the service for 'Looked after Children'. This was primarily seen as a problem in getting information in a timely way from the Department. This was highlighted to the senior management during feedback at the end of the inspection.

The records made by foster carers in relation to health issues and medication were seen to vary considerably. Some were robust and gave a clear picture while others contained insufficient information. It was planned that the filofax system for children being developed by the 'Looked after Children' Health Advisor would include health pages to encourage carers to record these details.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Children and young people spoken with reported feeling very well supported by foster carers in meeting their educational needs and gave the inspectors examples of how this happened in practice.

The fostering service has different strategies to manage structured occupation for children and young people excluded from school, for example, placement with fee paid carers and day care arrangements.

The educational attainments of looked after children and young people are monitored by the Multi agency Support Team Board meeting. This may be reviewed in the light of the establishment of the Directorate for Education and Children's Services.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is an established Leaving Care team for those in the care system aged over 16 years. The young people spoken with were not sure about the formal arrangements for this, but they were not 16 yet. They did confirm that they were supported and encouraged by their respective carers to develop the skills needed for independent living.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There are clear recruitment and selection procedures in place. There was evidence that there has been difficulty in recruiting to vacant posts. An overseas recruitment agency had been used and senior management in the Children and Families team had gone abroad to conduct interviews, following the receipt of online application forms. The application forms had been printed off and were held on individual personnel files. In one instance it was noted that the printout was incomplete.

There was no evidence on the files seen that telephone enquiries were made in addition to the written references.

Total number of staff of the agency:

14

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

3

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There is a clear management structure in place. When two experienced members of the team left an experienced family placement worker from another team was assigned to the post of acting assistant team manager.

Workload management is a key feature of the service and is overseen by the senior management team; this was evidenced in discussion with the manager and the fostering service staff. There was evidence that the team continue to be stretched to meet the demands of the service.

There was considerable variation in the maintenance of training portfolios by carers, one seen was excellent, and another carer did not have one.

The manager informed the inspectors that there is a designated person outside the fostering service team with responsibility for the monitoring of agency foster placements. A database of Independent Fostering Agencies was being developed which would include updates of statement of purpose, registration and inspection reports. In addition a referral system for social workers to apply for an Independent Fostering Agency placement.

It was reported that there have been significant changes to the administrative support arrangements for the fostering service. There are 3 dedicated clerical support staff for the service. The benefits of having dedicated administrative staff was emphasised by social work staff and foster carers. The view was expressed that there is some difference in the perception of roles for the social work staff and the administrative support staff. There had been some work undertaken to address this issue.

Staff of the fostering service reported positive relationships with the children's social workers and vice versa. When carers did not have a link worker there was no evidence that there was a system in place to maintain a relationship between the fostering service and the children's social worker. It is strongly advised that this be addressed.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There was considerable evidence that the fostering service and its management have adopted a flexible approach in their endeavours to recruit and retain staff. At the time of this visit interviews were about to be held for the new post of consultant practitioner to provide the team with a very experienced worker.

Despite this there was evidence that the shortfall of staff in post prevented the fostering service from meeting all the identified needs.

The manager said that the service is successful in recruiting prospective foster carers. There is a clear competency based assessment process in place. Prospective foster carers spoken with reported a significant delay (more than six months) between contacting the fostering service and being offered a place on the preparation group training. There remains a shortfall in carers for older children and children with complex needs. Prospective carers who express an interest in being assessed for children in these groups may be put on preparation courses run by other local authority fostering services.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There is an out of hours support line run by carers for carers which runs from 5pm to midnight each weekday and 9am to midnight at weekends. This is in addition to the Berkshire wide out of hours emergency duty team. Reading Carer's Link also provides support through a monthly telephone call to carers. The inspectors were informed of plans to extend this service to include respite carers.

The inspectors were made aware of 10 carers who did not have an allocated link worker. It was reported that the fostering service duty team managed support to these carers by means of regular telephone calls. It was acknowledged that this was less than satisfactory and it was hoped that the shortfall would be made good with the appointment to the consultant practitioner post.

The whistle blowing policy has been included in the foster carers handbook, which was distributed to carers in December 2004.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence of a good range of training courses available to fostering staff and carers, both in-house and external. Training is positively encouraged and supported. The manager identified the need to improve the record of training undertaken by individuals.

Opportunities for joint training with carers exist; one carer gave an example of this.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All those spoken with viewed supervision positively. It was reported to be undertaken regularly, with appropriate records being made. The inspectors saw supervision files that had been set up for sessional workers as recommended in the previous inspection report.

The informal support networks in the team were reported to be robust.

Regular team meetings are held and the minutes were seen as part of the inspection.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Foster carers reported in interviews and through questionnaires that they were generally well supported by the fostering service. A significant number felt that the service had insufficient staff and that staff did their best in a difficult situation.

The Reading Carers Link, funded by the local authority, provides a valuable resource to carers through the out of hours telephone service, the newsletter and bi monthly events for carers and children. It was not clear to inspectors how widely this service is known about and used by carers.

The fostering service had taken the decision that all overdue reviews should be brought to panel, and this was the case with the reviews observed during the inspection of the panel. The manager reported that due to staffing pressures annual reviews had been given a low priority. Reviews are required by regulation to “take place.... at intervals of not more than a year”. The inspectors noted that the link worker undertakes reviews of carers. It is strongly advised that consideration be given to the development of the review system that would incorporate a degree of independence.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

On the sample of foster carer files seen there were foster care agreements in place. At the time of this visit all link workers were qualified social workers. However experienced unqualified staff had undertaken this role in the past.

The panel chair highlighted the fact that unannounced visits were not happening in all cases and this will continue to be monitored by the panel.

A system has been established whereby carers sign for written information and there was evidence of this on the files seen. A draft handbook for Family Link carers was available at the time of this inspection.

There was evidence from one carer that in the absence of a link worker payments may not be made on time, particularly in respect of relief care placements. Family Link carers have a different system for payment and this was said to work well.

Records concerning complaints and allegations were seen to be appropriately maintained. Carers are offered independent support during an investigation through membership of The Fostering Network. There was evidence that this information had been provided to carers.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

One of the inspectors sat in on a session of training for prospective foster carers. An experienced foster carer is involved in the provision of this training and this was much appreciated by those attending the training. The staff involved in this training hope to expand the role of an experienced carer.

A number of carers who responded to the questionnaire reported that it was difficult to attend training, some because it was during work hours and others because it was out of school hours. It was a recommendation of the last report that both carers attend training where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers. There was evidence that this had not happened and this recommendation stands.

The fostering service has a clear commitment to provide a range training opportunities and support groups for carers. It is strongly advised that the availability of foster carers be determined so that courses can be timed to maximise attendance.

An area identified for development by the fostering service is the provision of support for the children of families who foster. This would be much appreciated by the foster carers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Standard met?

2

The child's case file is maintained by the child's social worker. The foster carers are asked to keep written records about events in the child's life and to complete a monthly summary. There was considerable variation seen in the content of these. Some provided a clear pen picture of children and significant events and developments; others provided little or no information. In one case this had been identified as an area for discussion with the carer. The foster carers forward summaries to their link worker and the link worker sends them on to the child's social worker. In the absence of a link worker there is no system in place for dispersal of information, it is strongly advised that this be reviewed.

The fostering service has a policy that carers should hold records securely; this was not the case in all foster homes visited.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Standard met?

3

The sample of records seen indicated that this standard was met.

The inspectors noted that allegations and complaints about carers were clearly recorded on the carers file in a separate section.

In the pre-inspection information provided it was noted that the register of children in foster care also included information about children and young people in other placements. It is strongly advised that this be reviewed.

The figures below were provided by the fostering service. It should be noted that the range of payments is graded according to the skills and terms of approval of individual foster carers and the number of children in placement.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			96
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			93
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			21
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			23
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			4
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	143	Maximum £	702

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service team is located in large purpose built council offices. The team are in an open plan office, alongside other children and families teams. There are secure record storage facilities. Access to the office is appropriately regulated.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not applicable to local authority fostering services.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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This standard is not applicable to local authority fostering services.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is clear information provided to foster carers about the allowance schedule. This outlines the payment levels and how allowances are paid. It is advised that the payment system for relief carers be reviewed to ensure prompt payment.

The fostering service operates a specialist scheme with fee paid carers for hard to place children and young people.

The service pays all its carers above the Fostering Network recommended rates; there is a reward element in the scheme.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The panel was observed, the panel chair interviewed and panel minutes were seen as part of the inspection.

Since the last inspection a new panel chair had been appointed and a new vice chair was proposed at the panel meeting observed following the resignation of the previous vice chair. The minutes seen did not routinely evidence who had chaired the panel between the resignation of the previous chair and the appointment of the current chair. The minutes also indicated that there had been some change in membership of the panel.

In discussion with the panel chair the inspectors advised that a review of the membership of the panel be undertaken. At the feedback at the end of the inspection the inspectors were informed that the review had taken place. It is strongly advised that the newly constituted panel receive training in the policies and procedures about the handling of their functions.

The panel chair had noted that foster carers did not routinely attend panel for their review and this area was to be addressed.

The inspectors were informed that consideration was being given to the establishment of a family and friends panel.

The panel chair outlined the plans to further develop the Quality Assurance process, to include a self-audit by the fostering service.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Family Link scheme has maintained a discrete identity whilst forming part of the fostering service. There is a part time assistant team manager for the scheme and 1.2 full time equivalent workers in post.

The Family Link scheme adopts a modular approach to assessment based on the type of care they are offering. This approach enables carers to move to providing day care to overnight care within carefully defined parameters, whilst meeting the regulations.

The recruitment of carers would benefit from further development. The staffing establishment for the service would also need to be reviewed in line with an increase in the number of assessments and carers to support.

The mainstream fostering service also offers a relief care scheme. Both schemes were very much appreciated by the families who use the service and the inspectors saw first hand the existence of very positive relationships between the families and the foster carers.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.**

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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There was evidence that this an area of growth and development for the fostering service. At the time of this visit there were eight family and friends assessments being undertaken. An analysis of work in the past year had resulted in the development of an initial assessment to determine the value of progressing to a full assessment. This had been used to provide information for the court on potential placements for children and young people subject to court processes.

The manager reported that the specialist post had given an improved focus to this area of work and the particular needs of this group of carers. A support group for family and friends carers has been set up, and at the time of this visit was being piloted with seven carers. It was planned to extend this to others. One family and friends carer felt that training and support groups especially for family and friends carers would be valuable.

The specialist family and friends worker informed the inspectors of the family and friends strategy group. Sub-groups were to be established in order to aid development of this growing area of work, which is not restricted to the fostering service.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 5th – 15th January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Recommendations already actioned.

FS30 – Foster Panel

Recommendations have already been implemented.

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/> YES
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I, Judith Russell of Reading Borough Council confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, Judith Russell of Reading Borough Council am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

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