



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Norfolk County Council Fostering Services

**Children's Services
Breckland Business Park
St Withburga Lane
Dereham
Norfolk
NR19 1DH**

Lead Inspector
Clive Lucas

Unannounced Inspection
12th July 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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

This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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

SERVICE INFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of service | Norfolk County Council Fostering Services |
| Address | Children's Services Breckland Business Park St Withburga Lane Dereham Norfolk NR19 1DH |
| Telephone number | 01362 694711 |
| Fax number | 01362 654816 |
| Email address | stuart.marpole@norfolk.gov.uk |
| Provider Web address | |
| Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) | Norfolk County Council - Fostering Services |
| Name of registered manager (if applicable) | N/A |
| Type of registration | Local Auth Fostering Service |

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13th June 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Norfolk Social Services Fostering Service is contained within the Children and Families division of Norfolk Social Services. The Service is divided into 3 main areas, mainstream fostering, specialist fostering and short term breaks. The short term break scheme is managed within the children with disabilities service. Some parts of the work are shared between the short term break scheme and the main fostering (foster panels, personnel) and others are specific to the short term break scheme. This report focuses on the short term break scheme. Under this scheme children will stay with carers for agreed times, this may be infrequently such as one day a month or more frequently such as two days a week. The children live with their parents at all other times and parents retain parental responsibility. The purpose of the scheme is to support families and provide additional experiences for children with disabilities.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection of Norfolk Children's Services short-term break service has been carried out by using information from previous inspections, information from the providers, parents of young people who use the service, carers, placing social workers and staff who work within the service. This report gives a brief overview of the service and the current judgments on how well the service is performing.

What the service does well:

The short-term break service is a very good one, which is improving. It works well with parents and carers to ensure that children's needs (including some complex health needs) are met. It provides positive experiences for children that help them to achieve their potential.

There is very good matching to make sure that children are placed with the best carers for them. Placing social workers spoke well of this process.

There is a thorough assessment and approval process for carers and they report that they are well supported by the service. Staff take pride in the work that they do.

The service makes carers aware of the CSCI report through a newsletter. Following the previous inspection they were informed that they could ask their support workers for a copy, and were given details of how to find it on the CSCI website. Copies of the report were circulated among family placement social workers and children with disability social workers who place children with the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Considerable improvements have been made since the last inspection, as development to work towards meeting the National Minimum Standards has continued. Areas of improvement include:

- making sure that there are annual checks of foster homes,
- the introduction of the Short Break Plus scheme to look after young people with more complex needs,
- the planning of a refresher course in child protection for carers who may have done their initial child protection training some time ago,

- the consultation exercise of last year has led to improvements in areas such as training (there have been considerable improvements in training of carers),
- how often carers should be visited and spoken with to support them and help them develop their care is now being agreed between support workers and managers.

What they could do better:

In order to further improve, the service should:

- make sure that when carers also foster for other teams, there is discussion between teams before a new young person is placed with them, so that young people are not placed together inappropriately.
- develop their health and safety checks to show what action that needs to be taken and when by.
- seek the views of parents (and through them their children) are sought and taken into account in the annual reviews of foster carers.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The outcome for this standard is excellent. The fostering service works in partnership with parents to promote the health and development of children.

EVIDENCE:

Parents remain primarily responsible for their children's health needs. Carers are given appropriate health information to allow them to care for the children. A new training provider is being used for paediatric first aid training for carers. Detailed health care plans are provided for young people who have particular or complex health needs. The relevant health care professional is responsible for preparing these.

One young person who was case tracked is epileptic. Written NHS guidance was provided for the carer on how to manage fitting; these included emergency contact details.

Carers are given written parental consent forms for medical treatment and they keep records of any medication they administer.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The outcome for this group of standards is good. The fostering service works to keep children and young people who are placed with it safe; there is some very good practice in matching young people to the right carers, so they get the best care. Improved liaison across all areas of Norfolk Children's Services fostering service is needed to make sure that matching takes account of all young people in the household.

EVIDENCE:

It was found at the inspection of June 2005 that a health and safety checklist had been introduced for family placement social workers (FPSWs) to undertake regularly as part of carer reviews. Some FPSWs reported that if there had not been any issues arising during the year, they would complete the form with the carer, but not necessarily check the accommodation themselves. All FPSWs have since been directed to check accommodation annually. This is in line with National Minimum Standard 6, which requires that foster homes be inspected annually and regulation 29 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, which requires that reviews of carers include assessments of the continued suitability of the household.

One health and safety checklist that was looked at identified a small number of matters that needed to be addressed, but there was no indication whether or not the required action had been taken. In discussion with the FPSW, it was

explained that these matters were continuing to be worked on and were discussed at each supervision. It is recommended that the health and safety checklists be used to identify any required action and monitor the carer's compliance with them, including timescales.

There continues to be thorough matching of young people and carers. Carers, parents and placing social workers commented upon this. Records are kept of the matching criteria. A placement meeting agenda has been drawn up to prompt discussion on issues such as matching and how the young person's voice will be heard. Introductions are thorough and take place at a pace that is appropriate for the young person.

Placing social workers commented that the FPSWs knowledge of the carers who they supervise is so thorough that the matching is good and this results in very few placement breakdowns. This is of great benefit to the young people who use the service.

One of the young people who was case tracked had waited for a year for a suitable carer to be found. This was due to the high level of need that the young person had. This need could only be met when a new part of the service, the Short Breaks Plus scheme, was introduced. This uses fee paid carers to provide breaks for young people with particularly high levels of need. At the time of this inspection there were two such carers and one of the cases that was case tracked related to one of them.

A small number of carers in the short-term break scheme may also foster for the specialist or mainstream fostering teams. FPSWs reported that when a young person is placed with the carers by one of the other teams, the short-term break FPSW and social workers for other children who stay with the carer should be consulted to make sure that there is appropriate matching of new young people with those already in the placement. However, it was reported that this rarely happens. Whilst the short-term break fostering service is matching very thoroughly, the failure of other parts of the service to consult on placements could have a negative impact upon the outcomes for young people using the service. The managers of Norfolk Children's Services Department fostering service as whole must ensure that placements are only made with a particular foster parent if they are satisfied that it is the most suitable, having regard to all the circumstances. Matching of young people with carers must take into account the ability of the carers to meet the needs of the young person to be placed as well as any other young people already placed there (including short-term break placements).

A number of FPSWs also expressed concern that budget cuts are threatening the matching process. The managers explained that there have not been any budget cuts for the service, but that as there are more demands upon the service levels of care are being assessed.

Some FPSWs also said that transport to take young people to and from placements has been significantly reduced. Consequently, there is a pressure to place young people with geographically close carers. One example was given of a young person who has school transport to take him home, then his mother has to transport him to his carer. This involves additional travelling for the young person and confusion and distress, as he cannot understand why he is going home and then leaving again.

FPSWs also stated that in some cases, care was being reduced and the first that parents heard of this was at the young person's review. Some parents had been left in tears. An alternative view was expressed that it is the function of reviews to re-assess the level of need. When short-term breaks are initially provided, families may be in crisis. When and if this crisis reduces it is right that the care reduces, so that additional care can be provided for those that need it. Clearly this is a complex matter.

Budgets are finite and currently under pressure, but Norfolk Children's Services Department has a duty to provide services for the young people who need them. Always getting the right balance is going to be challenging. The short-term break team manager is monitoring any cuts that appear to be inappropriate. It is recommended that this also includes any cases where matching has been compromised.

The level of care for the two cases that were looked at during the inspection was increasing.

The carer's preparation course covers child protection and safe care. A child protection refresher course has been drafted. When introduced later in the year, this will allow carers whose preparation and approval was some time ago to refresh and update their child protection knowledge. There have not been any child protection referrals in the short-term break service since the last inspection of June 2005. Safe care policies were present on the carer's files that were looked at as part of this inspection.

A selection of recruitment records for fostering staff and fostering panel members was looked at. These were appropriately kept, evidencing that the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 was being obtained.

Norfolk's fostering service uses five fostering panels. The short-term break scheme uses these panels in conjunction with the rest of the fostering service. Inductions and training are provided for panel members, and quality assurance measures are in place. It was noted from records and observation of a panel, that panels are taking a positive role in encouraging carers to undertake training. There was also evidence of panels monitoring health and safety issues and asking for further work to be done if issues were not covered. The venue used by one panel did not allow for a separate, private room for carers

to wait and for the chair to speak with them before or after their attendance at the panel. This panel are looking for an alternative venue.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 and 31.

The outcomes for this group of standards is good. The service copes well with the disabilities of the young people who use it.

EVIDENCE:

This service is specifically for children who have some form of disability. Through the use of appropriate equipment, good planning and positive attitudes, the children are helped to achieve their potential and to lead as full a life as possible. The parent and placing social workers spoken with commented positively on the positive experiences of young people while staying with carers.

The short-term break scheme does not have a range of carers from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, but neither are there many requests for such. However, the service would seek to recruit carers specifically for any child where this was necessary and is open to the opportunity to recruit carers from any background. At the time of the inspection one set of carers from a different cultural background was in the process of applying to be approved.

Parents remain responsible for their children's education, and due to the nature and timing of the short-term break care, the service has little involvement with the education of children placed through it. However, some good practice was noted whereby a Short Breaks Plus carer made several visits to a young person's school to see how the school managed the young person's behaviour and ensure that there was consistency between the school and the carer.

There is clarity within the short-term break service that parents remain the main carers for children.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

11

The outcome for this group of standards is good. The consultation exercise of last year has been used to improve the service for young people.

EVIDENCE:

The short-term break scheme undertook a review of the quality of care at the time of the previous inspection. As a result of this there have been some changes to the service, such as more accessible training and a change in some of the training.

Consultation with children is managed in a way that is meaningful to them. Parents and carers will also represent children's views.

Last year's review of the quality of care was well done and has led to positive changes in the service. It is important that the quality assurance process is ongoing. Information on the performance of the short-term break scheme is available from a variety of sources, such as reviews of carers and a monthly report by the manager of the service. It is recommended that there is an ongoing system for this information to be collated and along with the views of carers, parents and children be used to review the quality of care and subsequently to improve it.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

EVIDENCE:

These standards were not inspected on this occasion.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 26

The outcome for this group of standards is excellent. Development work on the Children's Guide and training for carers have been significant improvements in the last year. Carers are better prepared to look after the young people placed with them.

EVIDENCE:

There is a good Statement of Purpose. Work has been continuing on providing a Children's Guide that is suitable for the young people using the service. At the time of this inspection a draft Children's Guide was available. Each guide will be tailored to the individual young person that it is for. For instance it will include photographs of the young person's carers, social worker and favourite activities. Work will be done with parents and schools to make sure that the best way is used for communicating with each young person (such as the use of Widget symbols). This is a very positive and child-centred piece of work that the short-term break service should be commended for.

The introduction of direct payments, which allow parents choice in how to use the money for services, has resulted in a drop in the number of referrals for the short-term break service. Furthermore, as it is mostly the young people with less demanding needs whose parents opt for direct payments, the short-term break service is finding that referrals are tending to be for young people with greater needs.

Consequently, while overall numbers of referrals are dropping, there does remain a referral waiting list of about 25 (at the time of the inspection). The service continues to recruit new carers, but it is harder for carers without experience to be used, as there are not the less demanding placements that can provide them with experience.

Carers for the short-term break scheme are recruited and approved by the staff from the short-term break service. Only qualified staff undertake this work. The carers who have moved to the short break plus scheme have had a reviewed form F (the assessment form used in the approval process) and have gone to panel for their approval to be changed. One of these was looked at; it was a comprehensive piece of work.

When a FPSW is off sick for a significant period of time, the carers who they supervise are advised that they can contact any member of the team if they have any questions or problems. A nominal worker may be identified to hold these cases, but they would not actively manage the case.

It was a requirement of last year's inspection that staff appraisals should take place. Staff and managers spoken with during this inspection confirmed that appraisals are now taking place. There are regular team meetings.

Annual reviews of carers take place. These are presented to the fostering panel for the initial review and then every fifth year (or if there is a significant change to the carer's circumstances). For the intervening years an independent team manager within the short-term break scheme looks at them.

Comments are sought from placing social workers for carer reviews, but some FPSWs reported difficulty in getting these completed within timescales, as a number of cases are not allocated, but held by a team manager or assistant team manager. Comments for the annual review of carer's approval are not sought from parents of young people using the service. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 require that reviews are undertaken at least annually and that the fostering service seeks and takes into account the views of the child. Given the communication difficulties that children using this service may have, and that a number do not have allocated social workers, it is recommended that the fostering service seek the views of parents as part of the reviews of foster carers.

All FPSWs are qualified and well experienced in short-term break care.

There is a comprehensive and easily useable handbook for carers. Carers reported, through questionnaires and verbally, that they got good support from the service and had contact numbers for out of office hours if they needed them. Any problems out of office hours are usually discussed directly with the children's parents.

FPSWs in discussion with their managers, agree a frequency of supervision for each carer that they supervise. This frequency is recorded and the FPSW meets with the carer as agreed to supervise their work. These meetings are recorded in the carer's file either in their contact sheets/detailed records or as separate notes. Managers monitor the frequency and content of supervision. Similarly FPSWs and their managers agree whether there is a need to visit the home unannounced and how often this should happen. Short break plus carers receive monthly supervision and will have unannounced visits at least once a year.

One carer reported that they had to wait a long time for payment from the service. The short-term break manager said that there had been a period of time within the last year when a change in the payment system had led to some delays, but he believes that it has been sorted out.

Two social work assistants have been employed to manage some of the administration tasks and to support the FPSWs. They have taken on responsibility for some of the organisational tasks in relation to training. FPSWs reported that this has had a positive impact. The social work assistants monitor what training carers have undertaken and what they need to do. If a carer refuses two training courses the FPSW will be made aware of this, so that they can address it with the carer. A comprehensive training programme is provided and training calendars are produced every 6 months. Some carers have been able to undertake training alongside FPSWs and social workers. The short-term break service has made significant improvements in the training for carers.

In one of the cases that was looked at the daughter of the carer had been thoroughly involved in the whole approval, caring and support processes.

Appropriate records are kept by the service.

An issue of confidentiality was identified during last year's inspection, as one of the teams shared an office with staff that did not work for the service, or for Norfolk's Children's Services. At the time of this inspection the fostering team had the sole use of the office and it was envisaged that this would continue. Two staff in this office share a computer. Health and safety issues have been identified in relation to this, but they are being looked at.

The use of family and friends as carers is not an issue for this part of the fostering service.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

| BEING HEALTHY | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 12 | 4 |

| STAYING SAFE | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 3 | 3 |
| 6 | 3 |
| 8 | 2 |
| 9 | 3 |
| 15 | 3 |
| 30 | 4 |

| ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Standard No</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 7 | 3 |
| 13 | 3 |
| 31 | 4 |

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

| No. | Standard | Regulation | Requirement | Timescale for action |
|-----|----------|------------|--|----------------------|
| 1. | FS8 | 33 | The managers of the fostering service must ensure that placements are only made with a particular foster parent if they are satisfied that it is the most suitable, having regard to all the circumstances. Matching of young people with carers must taken into account the ability of the carers to meet the needs of the young person to be placed as well as any other young people already placed there (including short-term break placements) | 30/09/06 |

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

| No. | Refer to Standard | Good Practice Recommendations |
|-----|-------------------|---|
| 1. | FS6 | It is recommended that the health and safety checklists be used to identify any required action and monitor the carer's compliance with them, including timescales. |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| | | |
| 2. | FS8 | It is recommended that the team manager's monitoring of any cuts that appear to be inappropriate, also includes any cases where matching may have been compromised. |
| 3. | FS11 | It is recommended that there is an ongoing system for information on the quality of care provided to be collated and along with the views of carers, parents and children be used to review the quality of care and subsequently to improve it. |
| 4. | FS21 | It is recommended that the fostering service seek the views of parents as part of the reviews of foster carers. |

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Norfolk Area Office

3rd Floor

Cavell House

St. Crispins Road

Norwich

NR3 1YF

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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