



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

KCC Fostering

**Kent County Council
Social Services Department
Sessions House
County Hall
Maidstone Kent
ME16 1XX**

Lead Inspector
Alex Turner

Announced Inspection
8th January 2007 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	KCC Fostering
Address	Kent County Council Social Services Department Sessions House County Hall Maidstone Kent ME16 1XX
Telephone number	0845 3302967
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	http://www.kent.gov.uk/SocialCare/children/fostering/
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Kent County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Teresa Vickers
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Kent County Council fostering service is comprised of four area teams and a number of specialist services operating across the county of Kent. The service offers placements across the range for example short term, long term, emergency, and bridging placements. The specialist fostering schemes include Therapeutic Reparenting, Treatment Foster Care, and Support Foster Care for Children with Disabilities, Remand Foster Care and Parent and Child Placements. At the time of this inspection there was over 930 children and young people placed with foster carers approved by the service. There was close to 680 approved foster carers, between them offering a combined total of approximately 1,225 potential placements.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was conducted in the main over three days by four inspectors. One inspector visited each of the four area teams. Evening visits to eight foster carers homes were carried out and children and carers were seen and spoken to. Just over 150 carers and 180 children returned pre-inspection questionnaires. The majority of questionnaires were positive in their appraisal of the service. Where negative comments were made these were not to an extent that constituted significant trends that had not been recognised and or were being addressed. Conversations took place with social work staff, social work assistants, a practice supervisor, the team leaders of the areas inspected and the manager of the overall fostering service. A sample of records was reviewed that were selected from a wide range of records requested and made available for inspection. The quality ratings throughout this report relate to the specific findings of this inspection. Whilst overall the fostering service was found to be providing a good quality service there were also areas where excellent and less than satisfactory practice was identified.

What the service does well:

Overall quality in each of the six outcome areas has been rated as either good or excellent. Standards, which have been individually rated as excellent, are as follows –

NMS 7 - Valuing diversity

NMS 13 - Promoting educational achievement

NMS 11 - Promoting consultation

NMS 21 - Working with and supporting carers

NMS 24 - Training for carers

NMS 30 - Panel

What has improved since the last inspection?

Two requirements and six recommendations were included in the last report. These covered administrative records, medication procedures, fostering panels, children's reviews, premises, vehicle safety and sharing information about the ongoing performance of area teams. In each of these areas action has been

taken to address the recommendations made; both requirements have been met.

What they could do better:

No requirements have been included in this report. Recommendations have been made in the following areas –

NMS 12 – To consider including 1st aid training in that which is prioritised for carers to complete prior to accepting a placement.

NMS 6 – To consider the extent to which social workers carrying out health and safety checks have the necessary knowledge to do so effectively and to make available training or access to professional consultation and advice as deemed appropriate.

NMS 9 – To ensure that each foster family has developed safe care guidelines particular to their own circumstances prior to any placement being made with them. To ensure that foster families safe care guidelines are cleared with the placing social workers and that they are explained clearly and appropriately to each child and/or young person who is offered a placement with them.

NMS 16 – The arrangements to manage and supervise the work of social work assistants in the West Kent team should be reviewed.

NMS 17 – To review staffing levels and consider the impact on workloads of developments in fostering practice.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

NMS 12 - Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.

EVIDENCE:

Fostering teams and carers demonstrated a good level of awareness with regard to the health care services in their locality. Children and young people were being supported to access these. Examples of such included appointments with general medical practitioners, dental and optical treatment, nursing resources and children and adolescent mental health services. In each of the teams evidence was found of good partnerships having been established with allied health care professionals. The quality and detail of information about children's health status made available at the time of matching and included in placement plans was good. Promoting health is included in the training programme delivered to carers. The recommendation is made to consider including 1st aid training in that which is prioritised for carers to complete subsequent to their initial approval. The fostering service makes clear to carers the expectations placed upon them in terms of promoting children's health in the written guidance that is provided to them, in supervision and in the foster care agreement. Supervision and reviews of carers now have a greater emphasis on health matters. Work is taking place to improve the manner in which health records for children can be updated by foster carers during placements and to develop a format that children and young people have access to and that can move with them. Those children that returned pre-inspection questionnaires and made a comment regarding how they are helped to stay healthy all provided positive remarks in this area. Children described being provided with a healthy diet, being encouraged and supported to

exercise, to have good personal hygiene, to go to the doctors and how to keep safe and look after themselves.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

NMS 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 - Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

The persons carrying on and managing the fostering service are suitable to do so.

The fostering service takes care to ensure that children are placed with foster carers whose skills and circumstances match the needs to be met.

The fostering service takes seriously the need to maintain and promote children's welfare and safety and in doing so has contributed to protecting children from abuse and neglect.

The recruitment process is such that it ensures that people working for the fostering service are suitable to do so.

The fostering panels are operated in a manner that serves to ensure foster carers approvals and reviews are scrutinised and carried out in a proper manner.

EVIDENCE:

Kent County Council through its recruitment and supervision process is able to ensure that team leaders and the county fostering manager are suitable people to operate a service concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. During this visit those people managing the fostering service showed a high level of awareness pertaining to safeguarding children and promoting their general wellbeing and development. It was clear that the needs and welfare of children and young people were considered paramount.

Ongoing contact with foster carers has contributed to ensuring standards relating to accommodation and environmental safety in foster homes is maintained. The annual review process includes checks and overview of matters relating to this area of foster carers practice. The recommendation is made for the fostering service to consider the extent to which social workers carrying out these checks have the necessary knowledge to do so effectively and to make available training or access to professional consultation and advice as deemed appropriate. This is especially so in homes where there are factors to consider such as farm animals and swimming pools. Eight foster homes were visited during this inspection. In each case the accommodation provided was warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.

In the cases sampled the process to match children and young people with suitable foster carers had on the whole been well thought out and procedures applied in practice. Information provided to the fostering service at the time of referral and subsequent to a placement being made was generally considered to have improved in the last twelve months. Instances of less than satisfactory practice were found though these appeared to be exceptions to the rule. The fostering service has struggled to recruit foster carers in certain areas of Kent primarily in Canterbury and the west of the county. Action has been taken to raise the profile of fostering for Kent in these localities and the county manager continues to explore ways in which the issue can be addressed.

Contributing to the aim of promoting children's welfare and safety the training programme for foster carers includes child protection, safe caring skills and positive behaviour support. Safe care guidelines are routinely written by foster carers guided by the fostering teams though there remain some who have yet to do so. The recommendation is made that foster carers should all have developed these by the time a first placement is made with them. Whilst it was agreed by fostering staff that these policies should be revisited at the point each placement is made this was not well evidenced in practice. The recommendation is made to ensure that this becomes the norm. The foster care agreement stipulates that corporal punishment is not acceptable. Systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. Allegations against foster carers have been treated seriously and investigated according to procedures.

Kent County Council has previously demonstrated awareness of and compliance with the procedures required to recruit staff. Recruitment records were not inspected during this visit to the service. People employed to carry out social work functions are suitably qualified and experienced to do so. Staff demonstrated a good level of knowledge in relation to their role and of specific issues relevant to children placed and the foster carers looking after them.

The four area teams each have a fostering panel. Work undertaken by panel includes new approvals; change of approvals and considering complaints and allegations against carers. Following a review of practice changes have been made with regard to foster carers attending panel at the time of their review. There is a panel advisory board that serves in part to offer carers views of their experience of panel. These two examples serve as a good demonstration of the fostering service listening to and acting on the opinions of carers. Each panel operates within the parameters of the same written procedures and policies regarding the panel's functions. The fostering service has done well in the last year to recruit new panel members to replace those whom have served for three years or more. Each panel member is appointed subject to a satisfactory application, references, background checks and interview. There is a process to monitor and where necessary address panel member's performance. Training and written guidance for panel members has been provided. The panels have access to medical expertise. A review of panel minutes relating to those carers visited demonstrated the panels provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process. Feedback and guidance is given to assessing social workers regarding the quality of assessments. The panel receives information regarding foster carers reviews. The service is aiming to recruit persons to panel with experience of being fostered.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

NMS 7, 13 and 31 - Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

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

The fostering service recognises and works positively with diversity such that children's specific circumstances are taken into account and they are supported to partake in activities and interests that are important to them.

The fostering service contributes much to the promotion of positive educational outcomes for looked after children.

Short-term breaks provided by the fostering service are well organised and planned.

EVIDENCE:

Gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality are factors taken into account by the fostering service in its matching process. Training in valuing diversity is a core module in the programme delivered to foster carers. Specialist training for carers of unaccompanied minors has also been undertaken. The service subscribes to the principles of anti discriminatory practice and diversity in its written policies and procedures. The fostering service is represented on a working party to further develop good practice in this area from the point of initial contact to provision of care. Furthermore Kent County Council has and is carrying out equality impact assessments of key policies to help promote practice standards in this area. Fostering services for children and young people with disabilities have been reviewed and significant

changes in the configuration of these is planned with the introduction of a specialist fostering team for this client group.

The fostering service continues to work hard with carers and allied professionals to promote educational outcomes for children and young people. Measures in place at the time of this visit included literacy projects and library promotion, collaboration with independent fostering providers to address looked after children's exclusion from schools, links with schools, colleges and care leavers teams, attendance monitoring and training for carers. In addition the fostering teams benefit from having designated workers assigned specifically to work with children, carers and education providers to provide support in this area. These workers have been applauded within the teams for the quality of support provided. As reported by the county fostering manager these measures have been effective in their intentions such that key stage improvements have been noted in statistical data collected regarding looked after children's educational attainment.

Carers providing short-term breaks are approved, trained and supervised in the same manner as carers providing more regular placements. Where parental responsibility remains with birth parents this is recognised and taken into account in terms of plans made for promoting health and education.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

NMS 10 and 11 - Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

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

The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for children and young people.

The fostering service promotes consultation.

EVIDENCE:

In each of the teams visited evidence was found illustrating ways in which the fostering service and foster carers have worked to support children's contact arrangements. Contact arrangements were routinely included in the matters described in placement plans and discussed during supervision and reviews. Examples were found where children's opinions regarding contact arrangements had been sought and taken into account. Children and young people visited said that they were happy with the opportunities they had to have contact with their families and friends. Though it was apparent contact arrangements were primarily agreed by the children's social workers the extent to which contact arrangements had been risk assessed by them was less well evidenced in some of the files inspected. Training that covers contact issues is included in that which is provided.

Many of the children and young people have said that they feel involved in decisions and can have a say about things and be listened to. Of 183 completed pre inspection questionnaires 92% of young people indicated that their foster carers always or usually listened to them and took notice of what they said. The feedback about their social workers on the same topic was not

so positive with only 69% indicating always or sometimes in their response. These trends were reflected in the some of the comments made by young people visited during this inspection. Examples were noted where fostering social workers and social work assistants had taken the opportunity to listen to and consider children and young peoples opinions. Measures to expand the means by which young people can have their say have been promoted such as online consultation tools and partnership with children's advocacy projects.

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):

NMS 14 and 29 - Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.

The fostering service pays allowances and expenses in line with those agreed and specified.

EVIDENCE:

Young people have described a good level of support, advice and guidance to help prepare for adulthood. Input from the fostering team to help in these endeavours was rated highly. There was evidence that foster carers are doing a lot of independence skills work with the young people for example in learning domestic skills, money management and use of public transport. Links with other relevant teams were well established and these resources were being referred to in line with young peoples individual circumstances.

The fostering service has in the last year introduced a payment scheme designed to encourage and reward foster carers professional development. Whilst not unanimously welcomed by all foster carers the system is recognised as a positive means to manage this aspect of the fostering service. Whilst most payments were being made on time there were still occasional delays in payment for respite care and other types of intermittent or irregular placements. It is anticipated that new information technology systems to be introduced during 2007 will provide a solution to this problem. In certain circumstances travelling expenses incurred by foster carers are reimbursed. The current rate of payment for these expenses was an issue for some carers and perhaps should be reviewed.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

NMS 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 - Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

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

Relevant information is provided about the aims, objectives and provisions of the fostering service.

The service is very well managed overall and on an area basis. There is a culture of reflecting on and developing practice. Staff and carers are offered a good and often excellent level of support, supervision and training.

The demand on each teams resources continue to increase. The number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff may no longer be adequate.

The management of information was good. The benefits that planned developments in this area may bring are excellent.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has worked hard to present and distribute information about the services it provides. In addition to brochures and leaflets this information is available via the Internet. The format is kept under review and has been updated and improved over time.

A recommendation to review the arrangements to manage and supervise the work of social work assistants in the West Kent team has been included in this report. Overall however staff are organised and managed effectively. Team members were complimentary about the way in which the fostering service was carried on and of the support and development opportunities available. It was noted that the deployment of staff and prioritising of tasks has been impacted on by vacancies and absences. Furthermore an increased time demand created by raising requirements of practice in areas such as foster carers supervision and reviews has also been placed upon the teams. The recommendation is included in this report for a countywide review of establishment figures taking into account these and other developments in social work practice.

Support for foster carers includes ongoing contact with fostering social work assistants, 1-1 supervision with a qualified social worker, access to training, access to written guidance and information, respite care and out of hours back up and support. 153 foster carers completed preinspection questionnaires. 19% of these indicated that the overall performance of the foster service had improved; 75% indicated there had been no change and 6% that performance had got worse. Feedback regarding out of hours support was significantly better than in the two preceding years. Respite and especially that for carers and parents looking after children with disabilities remain an area where improvements need to be made. Shortfalls centre on availability and highlight disparity between areas. This has been recognised and changes to the way fostering services for children with disabilities are organised has been carefully reviewed in consultation with carer groups, culminating in plans to create a specialist team in this area.

The training programme has been well thought out and is firmly embedded in practice. Foster carers development is linked with the allowances paid. A clear programme of professional development has been created stretching from the induction stage through foundation modules to the attainment of National Vocational Qualifications in Childcare, diplomas and a higher education certificate level qualification in Health and Social Care (specific to fostering). The effectiveness of training is monitored and reviewed on an organisational level and through supervision and self-appraisal.

Case files and administrative records were well organised. A great deal of work has gone into the development of children and foster carers registers and in completing this project an outstanding requirement has been met. A project invested in by Kent County Council to overhaul and revamp information systems for children is at an advanced stage and due to come into practice at some point in 2007. The fostering service will be a benefactor of this development and has contributed to the specifications of design.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS12	The fostering service should consider including 1 st aid training in that which is prioritised for carers to complete prior to a accepting a placement.
2.	FS6	The fostering service should reconsider the extent to which social workers carrying out health and safety checks have the necessary knowledge to do so effectively and to make available training or access to professional consultation and advice as deemed appropriate.
3.	FS9	The fostering service should ensure that each foster family has developed safe care guidelines particular to their own circumstances prior to any placement being made with them.
4.	FS9	The fostering service should ensure that foster families safe care guidelines are cleared with the placing social workers and that they are explained clearly and appropriately to each child and/or young person who is offered a placement with them.

5.	FS16	The arrangements to manage and supervise the work of social work assistants in the West Kent team should be reviewed.
6.	FS17	There should be a review of staffing levels that takes into account the impact on workloads of developments in fostering practice.

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