

inspection report

Fostering Services

London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service

Room FR4.06

Fell Road

Taberner House

Croydon

Surrey

CR9 2BA

13th January 2004 (Inspection
Commenced)

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

London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service

Address

Room FR4.06, Fell Road, Taberner House, Croydon,
Surrey, CR9 2BA

Local Authority Manager

Mr Sammy Forbes

Tel No:

8686 4433 X 3718

Address

Room FR4.06, Fell Road, Taberner House, Croydon,
Surrey, CR9 2BA

Fax No:

020 8760 5665

Email Address

Steve_Liddicott@croydon.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 ?

NO

Date of last inspection

31/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		13th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	James Pitts	
Name of Inspector	2	Barry Khabbazi	
Name of Inspector	3	Margaret Lynes	
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. 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		Mr Sammy Forbes	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

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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**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service. 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 NCSC 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.
<p>Croydon Fostering Service at the time of the inspection had 160 foster carers looking after 172 children. The core function of the service is the recruitment, training and support of foster carers who can provide a range of flexible placements to match the needs of children from a diverse community. In order to maintain this service it provides a 24 hour support service, a mentoring support scheme for all new foster carers in their first year of fostering, a confidential counselling service, a support group for grandparents who have fostered their own grandchildren, a support group for long term foster carers and a support group for foster carers of unaccompanied minors. It also has a remand fostering scheme.</p>

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.)

The fostering service was found to continue to be well managed and adequately resourced for the level of services it provides. There continues to be a clear and achievable development plan that reflected national and local priorities. There were a total of nine requirements and ten recommendations. Of these there are a number that relate to the provision of appropriate information about the needs of children being placed and in particular about the way in which information is not adequately shared between placing social work teams and the fostering service. Monitoring systems still require improvement in terms of their effective application, particularly in respect of the case files but it is still hoped that generally this would be assisted by the introduction of an improved data base IT system. The number of positive suggestions that were made by both foster carers and children are commented upon in this report and the service are advised to explore these suggestions in detail as they are all geared to improving communication and making helpful change.

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:

YES

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:

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	
	30 (1)	FS25	A monitoring system needs to be introduced to ensure that all required information on the case records is in place and maintained.	21/07/03

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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**Signature****Second Inspector****Signature****Locality Manager****Signature****Date**

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 and recommendations 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	3 & 4	FS1	The fostering service must provide the Commission with the date on which the Statement of Purpose was formally approved by the divisional management team.	31/05/04
2	34	FS7	There must be more proactive thinking around the provision of aids and adaptations for families who look after children with disabilities, even if these are intended only as short term placements. Aids and adaptations must be made available to facilitate proper care of children with disabilities at least as a result of the second placement review or sooner should the need arise.	31/05/04
3	15	FS12	The Authority must ensure that all relevant medical information, including consent to medical treatment and medical examinations are in place for all fostered children.	31/05/04
4	16	FS13	The Authority must ensure that Personal Education Plans and relevant education information is supplied and that more diligence is applied in obtaining any missing information.	31/05/04
5	30 (4) & 38 (2)	FS22	The requirement to have foster care agreements in place must be diligently applied in all cases.	31/05/04
6	33 (b) & 38 (b)	FS24	The Authority must urgently review the degree of liaison between the Looked After Children's Teams in the district offices and the fostering service in order to ensure that information that is pertinent to the care of children is shared with the fostering service and carers without unnecessary delay.	31/05/04

7	30 (1)	FS25	An effective monitoring system needs to be introduced to ensure that all required information on the case records is in place and maintained (This requirement is outstanding from the previous annual inspection).	31/05/04
8	38	FS32	The fostering service must explore the view of friend and family carers in order to understand the perception of unequal treatment that exists and to address any shortcomings that may be identified.	31/05/04

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	FS8	The fostering service should examine in more detail with carers their views that a child's skin colour may form a primary reason for ending a trans racial placement, and that more could be done to consider other factors such as language, diet and religion.
2	FS9	Consideration should be given by the fostering service to establishing an independent support framework for carers that could advise and offer emotional support to those who experience allegations of abuse by a fostered child.
3	FS11	The suggestions that were raised by children in their conversations with the Inspection team should be explored in depth with them by the fostering service.
4	FS18	It would be advisable for the service remind all carers that they can access specific fostering service support outside of office hours.
5	FS21	The perceptions that were raised by foster carers about the support that they receive are clearly at odds with the aim of the systems that the service has in place that is designed to support carers in their role. This should be explored by the service with carers.
6	FS22	The view of foster carers that the foster care team should know when a child / young person is about to be moved, that as a result a place will then become available in that home, should be explored in more depth by the fostering service.
7	FS22	The view of carers that they are not supported in making complaints should be explored in depth with them by the fostering service.
8	FS23	The service should do better at evidencing what courses particular carers have attended, and to note this on the individual carers records.

9	FS25	It would be advisable for the service to add to the standard reference request letter a specific question that asks the referee if they know of any information or reason that suggests that a prospective carer may be unsuitable to care for children.
10	FS29	The suggestion by carers that an itemised payment system would help to identify whether under or overpayments were being made should be examined in detail by the fostering service.

* 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	11
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• 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	NO
• 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	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	13/01/04
Time of Inspection	10AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	77

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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?

2

As reported at the previous annual inspection the Croydon Fostering Service has produced a clear statement of the aims and objectives, which includes all the information required under standard 1.4. At the time of this inspection the inspection team were provided with a copy of this document that indicated that it is still in draft form and had yet to be approved. At the feedback meeting that took place as a result of this inspection the service agreed to supply the date on which the statement of purpose was approved by the divisional management team.

The Children's Guide has now been finalised and contains the contact details of the National Care Standards Commission. This guide now makes an explicit statement about how children and young people can make complaints in general and specifically to the National Care Standards Commission. The Inspection team were informed that a copy of the Children's Guide has been given to each foster carer and every child subject to their age and understanding.

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 management of the fostering service remains unchanged from that which was reported at the previous annual inspection. The Responsible Individual is the Divisional Director of Children's Services Mr S. Liddicott and the Manager is Mr S. Forbes who is the Service Manager for Children's Resources, which includes the Fostering Service. The manager showed an in-depth understanding of the complex needs of a fostering service, and had many proactive ideas for improvement. He has the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry on the in-house fostering provision. There is a clear programme of development for the fostering service that is derived from initiatives and targets set by Department of Health. The budget for the fostering service is in line with the development plans.

Mr Forbes confirmed that as the foster carer recruitment and retention programme has successfully achieved its targets there are now additional resources allocated to recruit sessional Social Work staff.

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?

3

A full review of the recruitment practice was not undertaken at this inspection as this had been carried out as part of the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) review of children's services in March 2002. The report stated that "there was good attention to vetting procedures, all files showed evidence that appropriate references, police and protection of children (POCAL) checks, proof of identity and verification of qualifications had been done". A review of the background checks for the one permanent Social Work staff member, appointed since the previous annual inspection, was undertaken. This indicates that correct and diligent recruitment protocols continue to be applied.

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

The job descriptions of the staff are clear and identify their responsibilities and roles. From the interviews with Supervising Social Workers it continues to be clear they understand their individual roles, responsibilities and decision making authority within the organisation and between themselves and the children's allocated field Social Worker. The activities of fostering service staff are monitored through regular supervision and monitoring of agreed performance targets. The Fostering Service Plan identifies the agreed annual targets the service has to achieve. At the previous annual inspection the service Manager identified a weakness in the collection collation and analysis of data in order to inform management decision making and identify developing trends. Since that inspection the manager has set about exploring database systems that will allow for statistical analysis of trends within the service and allow for the identification and monitoring of regular tasks and activities that the service has to undertake. There are financial procedures in place that continue to be independently monitored.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC 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.

1

Number of complaints made to NCSC 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 of the service has a clear job description identifying his roles and responsibilities for the fostering and adoption service. There are team managers who take day to day responsibility for these services who will also deputise in his absence. As reported at the previous annual inspection, the authority are to be mindful that the National Care Standards Commission are to be notified if the manager ceases to manage the service in order that it can verify what arrangements are in place to cover the absence. A notification of this type has not, however, been required to be made thus far.

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?

3

Evidence from tracking visits to the homes of foster carers and feedback from the children's social workers and children's questionnaires indicated that generally the accommodation provided continues to be suitable and safe. Foster carers are provided with written guidance on health and safety issues and First Aid training is also provided as part of the core training programme for foster carers.

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?

2

Carers who looked after children with disabilities felt that the support given was generally very good – with the exception of the provision of equipment. There needs to be more proactive thinking around the provision of aids and adaptations for families who look after children with disabilities which should occur no later than the second placement review, or sooner if the need arises. The problem of short-term placements often 'overrunning' could then be addressed and appropriate aids and adaptations could be provided where the placement is becoming longer term. Carers who are then of the view that they are struggling with providing care could also then be provided with the necessary equipment earlier should this be necessary.

Information from the Pre-Inspection Questionnaire states that the fostering service actively promotes diversity and anti-discriminatory practice. The Service Plan states that the service is continuing to work towards their aim to increase the pool of carers for children with disabilities, unaccompanied young people and children and young people from ethnic minority communities. Information from the children's group meeting and questionnaires supports the position that they are valued and encouraged to develop and pursue their interests and hobbies.

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?****3**

Most of the carers who were present at the carers group meeting had experienced trans-race/trans-cultural placements. All were very positive about the experience. On a negative note, it was felt that the foster care team only looked at a child's skin colour and for this reason terminated placements abruptly, if a family of a more appropriate racial origin (specifically in terms of skin colour) became available. It was felt that they failed to consider other issues such as language, diet and religion. There were mixed views about the additional support given in these placements. One carer who had a black child had immediately been given additional funding for hair/skin care. However one carer who had cared for Muslim children had asked for extra help with English tuition, and was told it was not available. Those who foster new-borns felt that more should be made of the child's birthday. Most newborns would come home from hospital with a bounty bag, cards and photos. These were often lacking for children going straight to foster care, and made it hard for carers to start off their fostered child's life story books. It was accepted that children placed in an emergency could rarely be properly prepared. Nevertheless it was generally felt that the old system where there was a dedicated emergency team with specific knowledge of foster care worked far better than the current generic duty system.

Where foster carers are asked to take placements outside of their approved category this is now monitored and the situation is now informed to the fostering panel as part of their quality assurance function.

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?****3**

All those present at the carers group meeting were unanimous in their views regarding the support given if there is a child protection issue. Their view was that basically there is no support for carers. If a child protection allegation was made, the carers said that they were totally left out on a limb, even to the extent of being told by members of the fostering team that they would be 'on their own' until the issue was resolved. While all the carers understood and appreciated the fact that the staff were employed by the Council and therefore may have to observe strict boundaries in such circumstances, they felt that there should be some external advocate that they could contact. Consideration should be given by the fostering service to establishing an independent support framework for carers that could advise and offer emotional support to carers who experience these situations. The fostering service has, since the previous annual inspection, issued guidance to foster carers about how to tackle bullying that children may report as experiencing, whether at school or in the home.

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

90**%**

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

Evidence from foster carers and children's questionnaires indicated that children were supported to maintain regular contact with their birth families. The service expects that the commitment of foster carers to assisting children to maintain contact with parents was pivotal in their initial acceptance and approval as foster carers. The issues around the importance of contact, where this is in the child's best interests, remains an integral part of foster carers training and preparation. It also continues to be evident that where children have limited contact with birth parents foster carers are also pro-active with supporting children to maintain these links.

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?**

3

The normal point for children and their families to express their views arises at the annual review and when Looked After Children documents are reviewed. The majority of the children who spoke with the Inspection team confirmed that they knew how to make a complaint to the Local Authority and details of how to make a complaint to the Commission has been added to the information booklet that is given to them. Of particular interest was the range of suggestions that children and young people made to the Inspection team for things that they think could be improved. These are as follows:

Easier access to contact with their Social Worker when they have questions to ask

To see parents and siblings more often

That as fostered children they would like to have the chance to meet others in foster care as a group

That the Inspection should be more child friendly and that the children's group meeting should be held in a different venue (on this occasion it was held in a Committee room at the Town Hall)

All of these suggestions should be explored by the fostering service in more depth with the children, with the exception of the final suggestion, which will be passed on by the Commission to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, which will take over the work of the NCSC in April 2004.

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?****1**

At the foster carers meeting it was suggested that there could be better planning with regard to things like medical check ups for the children, so that they were not unnecessarily repeated. A couple of years ago there was a medical co-ordinator in post and it was queried if they still existed. Additionally it was noted from some of the children's case records that consent to medical treatment, specifically where it was required to be signed by a child's birth parent or legal guardian, was missing and had not been followed up. Clearly there may be some cases where a birth parent, or parents, may not be willing to co-operate by signing the necessary consent documentation, however, in these instances this should be clearly stated on file as being the case. The authority should liaise with their own legal department to explore the position of foster carers in these circumstances and to provide clear guidance to the authority as a whole as to what to do if signed consent can not be obtained from birth parents or legal guardians in the case of children who not the subject of care orders.

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?****2**

The Fostering Service still does not on a regular basis monitor the educational achievements of the children placed with its foster carers although Croydon has introduced a specific annual awards event that celebrates children's achievements in this area to which carers may nominate children for an award. The Fostering Service involves a Looked After Children Education Team to provide input in the training of foster carers and actively promote their educational attainment. Foster carers are expected to support the children in their education and where agreed liaise with schools. It does provide extra financial support if children are not in school but also recognises that this remains an area where extra provision needs to be developed. Foster carers also contribute to the children's Personal Education Plan, although more diligence is needed by placing Social Workers in district Social Work teams to ensure that these plans are completed for all children and updated annually. The Fostering Service has now provided all foster children of school age with a computer.

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**

As reported at the previous annual inspection, the London Borough of Croydon has a specific team to help prepare young people for independence. All foster carers with young people of 16 years plus help in developing Pathway Plans to ensure that the young people are adequately prepared for leaving care. In some circumstances young people can also continue to live with their foster carers after their 18th birthday in supported care arrangements or have after care support provided by their foster carers. Foster carers are also involved in Preparation for Leaving Care Groups.

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?

3

As part of the tracking exercise on the files of the foster carers it was noted that out of 3 files there was either only partial CRB information for relevant carers or members of the household or in cases there was none. It was reported at the previous annual inspection that this should be addressed using a monitoring programme, which is now in place, to ensure that all outstanding checks have been completed.

One personnel file, that of a Supporting Social Worker who has joined the team since the previous annual inspection, was examined. This contained all of the necessary information that is required.

Total number of staff of the agency:

32

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

0

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?

3

The fostering service continues to have clear lines of management accountability. Staff receive regular supervision and support from the Team Manager. The fostering service team meeting was observed as a part of this inspection and was seen to be monitor and prioritise workloads, assign tasks to appropriate staff and to discuss plans and proposals for development of the service. The core areas of work of the Supervising Social Workers are regularly monitored and the service manager is still seeking a method for improved data monitoring. Once a system is in place this should greatly assist the service in highlighting tasks that require attention as well as aid information gathering for statistical and management purposes. A designated team carries out the recruitment of foster carers. Therefore Supervising Social Workers are not involved in this process but have a target figure of 15 foster carers to support and visit on a monthly basis. As the foster carer recruitment and retention programme has achieved a good degree of success further recruitment to the team has occurred by means of employing a number of sessional social work staff.

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?****3**

As reported at the previous annual inspection, The full time staff employed are currently adequate to meet the needs of the fostering service. The staff interviewed were positive about the support and training they received and the way the service is developing. The recruitment of foster carers continues to focus at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of the children who were to be provided a service. There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the size of the service. There is a clear set out assessment process detailing all the qualities, competences and aptitudes expected from prospective foster carers.

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?****3**

The recruitment and employment practices were sound in respect of both staff and carers. There was a 24 hour support service which was commented on positively by foster carers in their interviews, although some carers were under the impression that it was only the general emergency duty team that provided this and were not aware that the service also provides this specific support. It would, therefore, be advisable that the service reminds all carers that they can access specific fostering service support outside of office hours. The fostering service had comprehensive health and safety policies for all those involved in the service and adequate insurance to cover all eventualities. There is now a Whistle-blowing Policy for foster carers and contact details and explanation of the role of the National Care Standards Commission involvement in the complaints process.

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**

The Local Authority provides core training for its employees. All new staff undertake a Foundation Child Protection course, and can also undertake interdisciplinary training in Child Protection. There are opportunities to enhance and develop individual skills. Staff training needs are identified through supervision and current issues and legal developments are discussed at team meetings. An identified training strategy for fostering service staff that is routinely evaluated and linked to the Statement of Purpose and aims and objectives of the service has now been developed.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

As reported at the previous annual inspection, all staff have clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them. The policies and procedures of the organisation are contained in overarching policy documents for children services. All the staff receive regular formal supervision as well as informal discussions and consultations. There are weekly team meetings and a Unit Meeting.

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?****3**

The overall response from the foster carers who attended the carers meeting was positive about the support that is provided by supporting Social Workers, however some criticisms were made of the systems that the service operates. All those present were unanimous in their condemnation of the ad-hoc payment system. It was impossible to determine what payments were for, and often the payments arrived very late. There were several examples of staff not honouring verbal agreements regarding additional support for a particular child (children). Examples given were the provision of a taxi to take a child to school, and the retraction of agreement to pay an enhanced rate. The majority of those who gave responses to the Inspection team felt that the information provided about individual children was often wrong. It was passed down through many tiers of staff and could actually end up being totally inaccurate. A number of the carers felt that given they were assessed each year as to their continuing suitability, they, in turn, would like to be asked for their views on the foster care team. These perceptions are clearly at odds with the aim of the systems that the service has in place that is designed to support carers in their role. The fostering service must address these issues, as there is a risk of losing carers who may not perceive that the service does all that it can to support them.

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?****1**

Most of the foster carers that provided responses to the Inspection team have had good experiences of working with supervising social workers, however several commented that better forward planning was needed. The foster care team should know when a child is about to be moved on, or when they reach 18, and that a place will then become available in that home. Better planning would prevent placements remaining empty for months at a time. There was universal agreement that carers were not supported in making complaints. Indeed, they all felt that it was pointless to try to pursue a complaint beyond making an initial comment as they felt that they were stigmatised and future placements were less likely to be made. On a positive note, all agreed that funding to purchase essential items such as clothing was usually promptly paid, albeit there was often a lengthy delay in the commencement of payment of regular fees for newly placed children (please also refer to Standard 21).

It was also noted by the Inspection team that agreements in relation to individual placements for children with specific carers is missing in some of the cases that were tracked. The requirement to have these agreements in place must be more diligently applied.

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?****3**

The feedback that was received from carers was almost entirely very positive about the training provided. Access to training is believed by carers to be easy and there is a wide range of courses available. It is, however, necessary for the service to do better at evidencing what courses particular carers have attended, and to note this on the individual carers records. This would greatly assist in the monitoring of individual carers training needs and in keeping track of any short falls in training that occur. Additionally it would also help to identify when specific training needs to be refreshed.

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?

1

The degree of information that is kept directly by the fostering service varies considerably. The Inspection team were provided with access to the district Social Work files of specific children who were randomly selected as a part of the case tracking exercise. The amount of information that was present also varied considerably as too did the diligence with which information was obtained, or was noted as being unobtainable. The list below outlines examples of necessary information that was lacking in some cases:

- Medical consent section of Looked After Children forms not signed by relevant persons authorised to provide consent (please also refer to Standard 9)
- Personal Education Plans
- Fully completed Looked After Children documentation (although there were several cases this was quite good)
- Evidence of health checks for children, in at least one case a full annual medical appeared to be overdue
- Pathway plan for young people leaving care (although it was acknowledged on record that one was needed)

Clearly in the case of emergency placements, or in the case of children not previously being known to the Social Services Department, full information may not be readily or immediately available. However, in many instances children are known to the authority prior to their placement with the fostering service and in these cases there is no excuse for relevant background information not being shared with the service, and particularly the children's foster carers. Failure in this area risk undermining the potential for successful matching decisions to be made which must be based on all relevant factors that need to be considered in relation to individual children's needs. This failure in turn risks undermining the potential for a successful placement. There is an urgent need for far closer liaison between the Looked After Children's Teams in the district offices and the fostering service in order to ensure that information that is pertinent to the care of children is shared without unnecessary delay.

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?****1**

A total of 10 Foster Carer files were tracked as a part of this inspection. These records varied in quality and it was noted that in some cases the following information was not in evidence:-

Copies of written references

Evidence of training carried out by carers

Foster care agreements

Evidence that CRB checks were carried out (although this was later confirmed)

(there was also paperwork on some of the files that related to children who had moved on. This should have been re-filed elsewhere)

An auditing system is in place, however, it is evident that in at least some cases this is failing to highlight gaps in information or the action that needs to be taken to remedy this. The fostering service should now fully audit all approved foster carers files in order to identify what information is missing and implement an action plan to obtain the missing information for all carers who have been approved since 1st April 2002. It would also be advisable for the service to add to the standard reference request letter a specific question that asks the referee if they know of any information or reason that suggests that a prospective carer may be unsuitable to care for children.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

172

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

280

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

150

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

29

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

6

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

164.78

Maximum £

368.53

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 and Adoption Service operates from one open plan office. They have access to two private rooms for meetings and consultations, which can be opened out to provide adequate space for the monthly team meetings. All other fostering service activities, training, panel meetings and foster carers support groups are carried out in different Local Authority buildings. The fostering service has generally efficient administrative procedures and appropriate IT and communication equipment and a new IT programme has recently been introduced. Croydon Council has back up systems for information retrieval however a risk assessment of how the service would operate without access to IT and or hard copy systems may be useful, as was suggested at the previous annual inspection. The Service Manager is continuing his efforts to identify a suitable database that would allow for easier access to management information. This would have the added benefit of assisting the service to keep track of the complex range of information that is required to be held and with identifying the point at which certain information requires updating.

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?

0

This standard was not examined in any detail at this inspection.

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?

3

A budget and financial position document for the fostering service was provided. The overall budget is allocated to specific budget headings and the Local Authority internal financial section monitors these regularly. The ability of the fostering service to achieve its agreed development targets for 2004/2005 is dependent on the priorities of the Local Authority Social Services Department.

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 a written policy on fostering allowances that is available to foster carers this is reviewed annually. Payments can be enhanced according to the needs of the child and the experience and qualification of the foster carers. However most of the responses from carers who attended the group meeting with the Inspection team stated that there continues to be anomalies in respect of finances, which included, inadequate support, and delays in decisions on financial enhancements and changes to the allowances. It was once again suggested by carers that an itemised payment system would help to identify whether under or overpayments were being made. It remains important that foster carers receive clear information about the allowances and expenses payable.

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?	3
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Two members of the Inspection team observed the fostering panel. This panel meeting considered two applications for the approval of new foster carers and four foster carer annual reviews, three of which included consideration of a change of category of children for which the carers in question were originally approved. This observation noted that the panel was well conducted, efficient and relatively effective. The Chair commented that the fostering service was slowly starting to act in accordance with the Panel's recommendations. Quality assurance systems (particularly monitoring) are being introduced, and the Chair showed an experienced and proactive approach to the improvements that are necessary for the 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?
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As reported at the previous annual inspection, the fostering service has a policy and procedure in place for referral and decision making process in respect of the placement of children for short-term breaks. These are normally focussed on children with disabilities although there are also arrangements in place for non disabled children as part of general support to families.

Two foster families who provide this service were visited as a part of this inspection. The carers reported that the level of support that they receive is appropriate. (Please refer to standard 7 for additional comments made by other 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?	1
The families of children placed under Regulation 38 (Family and friends as carers) who provided feedback to the Inspection team were unanimous in feeling that they were not treated in the same way as other carers. While they had to meet all of the standards applied to other foster carers, they believed that they are not provided with anything like the same range of funding for providing for children's needs. This in their view could lead to financial difficulties, but if funds were requested they also believed that they were made to feel like 'money-grabbers'. The national minimum standards for fostering services specifically require that the service provide for support and training needs in the same way as that which is expected to be provided for carers who look after children in other circumstances. To this end it is necessary for the fostering service to explore this view of friend and family carers in order to understand the perception of unequal treatment that exists and to address any shortcomings that may be identified. The fostering service points out that family and friend carers are not expected to provide some of the services that other carers do, for example to be on the rota of carers to provide placements out of hours.		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(Not applicable at this Inspection)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D**PROVIDER'S RESPONSE****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 <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

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

NO

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

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

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