



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Devon County Council Fostering Service**

**County Hall  
Topsham Road  
Exeter  
Devon  
EX2 4QJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Romana Young

*Announced Inspection*  
6 February - 3 March 2006      10:00

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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** Devon County Council Fostering Service

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Exeter  
Devon  
EX2 4QJ

**Telephone number** 01392 386052

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**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Devon County Council

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Andrea Morris

**Type of registration** Local Auth Fostering Service

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      February 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Devon County Council fostering service provides the following range of services:

- Respite care for children in need of regular breaks from their families
- Emergency short term placements
- Short or temporary placements
- Long term or permanent placements
- Parent and child placements
- Family care worker placement – a placement scheme for children with complex needs
- Remand placements
- Day care support
- Private foster care

The service operates three mainstream fostering offices, located in Totnes (South and West team), Exeter (Exeter and East Devon team) and Barnstaple (North and Mid Devon team), and three specialist fostering offices – two family care worker scheme teams, located in Totnes and Willand, and the remand fostering scheme based in Exeter. The fostering service employs, on full or part-time basis, a staff of 72, which includes managers, social workers and support staff who work directly with foster carers and office based administrative and clerical support staff. The fostering service manager, who is based in the same office as the South and West mainstream fostering team, is supported in the management of the service by six locality based practice managers.

The fostering service is a major childcare resource within the county's range of services for looking after children. Currently there are 306 fostering households registered, of which 17% are part of the specialist fostering provision. Over half of the looked after children in the county are placed within the fostering service at any one time.

The service has links to specialist health, education, psychology and CAMHS services.

# SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors undertook this announced inspection and during the course of the inspection, visited three fostering service offices and interviewed fostering service staff, including the fostering service manager, three practice managers from mainstream and specialist fostering teams, two mainstream fostering link social workers, two senior support workers and one support worker from specialist teams, administrative support staff, a placement coordinator and the fostering promotion officer. The inspectors attended family care worker scheme and mainstream fostering team meetings and spoke with staff.

Seven foster homes (three mainstream fostering, three family care worker scheme and one remand foster home) were visited and the inspectors spoke with the foster carers and eight children and young people, aged between seven months to 15 years, living in those foster homes. The inspectors also met with parents of five of the children and young people placed in these foster homes.

The inspectors attended, and spoke with foster carers at, four mainstream foster carer support group meetings, one specialist foster carer support group meeting and part of a foster carer training session and also observed a "Sports Active" programme session involving ten young people placed within the family care worker scheme and their support workers. The inspectors also attended a foster panel meeting and interviewed the chairperson.

Five foster carer files and seven children's and young people's case files were inspected and care managers for these children and young people interviewed. A visit was made to County Hall to inspect a sample of fostering service staff files in liaison with the county criminal records disclosure department.

148 placing officers' (care managers'), 63 foster carers' and 60 young people's survey questionnaires were returned. These responses were analysed and used to inform the judgements made in this inspection report.

Other documentation examined and used to inform the judgements in this report include the pre-inspection questionnaire and manager's self-assessment form, statement of purpose, children's guide, fostering newsletters and other information supplied as requested.

The arrangements for private fostering and kinship care were not inspected at this inspection visit.

The inspectors wish to thank the fostering service staff, foster carers, young people, their parents and care managers for their cooperation and assistance with this inspection and in particular, the foster carers and young people who welcomed us into their homes.

## **What the service does well:**

The enthusiasm and dedication of all staff, particularly in their drive to improve practice, and their commitment to the service, is commendable. Foster carers the inspectors had contact with were excellent ambassadors for the service.

There is good leadership of the service by a stable, experienced and competent management team.

Generally, care managers feel that foster carers are doing a very good job of looking after the children and young people in their care and that, in the main, they work well with the authority and the young person's family. Also, generally, there is good communication and working together between care managers and the fostering service.

Children and young people feel well cared for and safe in their foster homes. They also feel that foster carers give them good support with their education and encourage them to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Foster carers, generally, feel they receive excellent support from their fostering link social worker and other foster carers, and value this highly. Fostering support groups are similarly valued highly by foster carers as an excellent means of support. Some foster carers also reported that they receive very good support from the care manager for the child, although this was a variable experience.

Foster carers also commented very positively on the training provided for them and felt that this was very relevant and useful.

In particular, foster carers and parents praised the flexibility and high level of support offered by the family care worker scheme. Support workers were described as experienced, knowledgeable, practical and skilled in work with looked after children. The "Sports Active" programme is also an excellent adjunct to the scheme. Staff working in this programme exhibited a high degree of skill and sensitivity in encouraging and supporting the young people to participate in sporting activities, which as well as promoting healthy physical development also allows the young people the opportunity and challenge of developing new skills and helps to build a sense of achievement and self-worth. Remand foster carers feel supported and valued by the fostering service but sometimes feel underutilised, which they perceive is due to budget constraints within the Youth Justice service.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

There were five statutory requirements and eight good practice recommendations made in the previous inspection report, which was only finalised just over three months before the start of this inspection. The service has drafted and implemented an action plan to deal with issues raised at the last inspection visit. The inspectors have taken into account that some aspects of the action plan, have, of necessity, therefore, only very recently been implemented, with progress still in the early stages.

Also, there is, currently, an on-going internal review of the development of the fostering service, which includes how the service should be structured and the management, support and retention of carers. The review is in its final stages,

but the final report and recommendations were not available at the time of the inspection visit.

The County Council's Criminal Records Disclosure department is working to meet the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations and intends to retain staff CRB certificates until the next inspection, as agreed between CSCI and the Criminal Records Bureau. There is still some way to go before this process is complete but progress is encouraging.

At the time of the last inspection visit, the pilot initiative of fostering service managers or link social workers taking on the responsibility for chairing initial placement planning meetings was just being implemented. The aim was to improve on the number of these meetings being held within the correct time frames and ensure that necessary health and other information was available to the foster carer prior to placement so that they would be able to provide suitable care. Despite initial concerns expressed by some fostering service workers about how this would work in practice, this has been a very successful initiative, which has now been adopted as operational procedure. Foster carers reported, generally, an improvement in placement planning procedures, particularly for planned placements. There are still some issues arising from emergency placements but there had been also been some improvement in how these were managed also.

An improved system to record and monitor the granting of an exemption to a foster carer's registration has been instigated. However, more needs to be done to ensure that situations where exemptions have been granted are not allowed to "drift" and that the timescale agreed at the start of the placement is adhered to. Foster carers should be reassessed, their skills and abilities reviewed, and the application presented to the foster panel for consideration if any change to the foster carers' registration is required for the placement to continue.

Another significant development has been the introduction of fostering support worker system, already in operation within the specialist fostering family care worker scheme, into the mainstream fostering service. Whilst the support available from these support workers has not met some foster carers expectations (mainly because of an initial misunderstanding of the scope and purpose of the support worker role), foster carers who have received this service felt it was a helpful and valuable support to them and much needed. However, the role of the fostering support worker appears to have a different interpretation in different parts of the mainstream fostering service and, in some cases, crosses over into more of a supervisory role of foster carers, which is not appropriate, as the supervision of foster carers should be undertaken by an appropriately qualified social worker. The role of the fostering support worker needs to be very clearly defined, with consistent operation, so that foster carers across all parts of the service have equal access to this type of support.



A system for ensuring that CRB checks on foster carers are renewed every three years is now in operation.

Information systems about the service are improving with the on-going development of leaflets and the fostering section of the local authority web site. A new information leaflet about how foster carers can access information and support when an allegation has been made against them has been produced. This gives clear advice about legal and other support available for foster carers and useful contact telephone numbers.

## **What they could do better:**

Devon County Council made a decision to manage financial issues with a freezing of vacant posts. This issue was completely outside the control of the service manager and the staff and at the time of the inspection, was beginning to impact upon the fostering service. For example, the family care worker scheme had just one social worker conducting assessments and reviews of foster carers. Posts in other parts of the service were also affected and it was feared that this would lead to shortcomings in the service provided, but before this report was prepared, the freeze on fostering service posts was lifted.

All foster carers should be supervised by a named and qualified social worker, but, particularly in the family care worker scheme, this is not the case. No one in the scheme raised this as an issue, and the foster carers in this scheme were full of praise for the support offered by support workers, but technically this does not meet the standard. Also, some mainstream carers reported not having a named qualified link social worker, or inadequate arrangements having been made when their fostering link social worker was absent due to leave or illness. This was not the case across all the parts of the service and the service did have a plan in place to provide some cover for vacant posts during the recruitment freeze. However, some carers were not aware of the cover arrangements and others said that they were not being given adequate support. As some foster carers also reported that, in some cases, children lacked an allocated care manager, or that there were frequent changes in care managers, plus a variable service in terms of communication and working together from individual care managers, and difficulties in accessing advice and support where care managers are working part-time, it is vital that the service maintains high quality, qualified link social worker support as this is what carers report as a key element in maintaining placements and foster carer morale.

Some children and young people said they had experienced frequent changes in social workers (care managers) and that this was unsettling for them. Some also said that they had difficulty in contacting their social worker when they needed to, particularly when their social worker worked part-time, and that this sometimes caused difficulties for them if they seeking permission to do something and needed a swift response.

The length of time taken to conclude investigations into allegations made against carers, or complaints made by carers, was a significant source of dissatisfaction highlighted by carers. Carers also reported having felt left isolated, “shut out” and, generally, unsupported by the service, in these circumstances. The system for supporting carers and how matters can be speedily progressed should be reviewed and a proactive management system for reviewing progress in these areas operated.

Some carers also reported not feeling valued, particularly by some care managers and although they feel listened to, they do not always feel heard, or that their views have been given any weight or due consideration. Carers feel that more public acknowledgement and celebration, by the service, of their role and their commitment to the service, for example, to, also, mark five years’, as well as ten years’ and above service, would be very useful in promoting a wider understanding of their role and attract more interest in fostering.

Some mainstream foster carers identified issues with payments starting and stopping (or not stopping), and identified that this was often related to the effectiveness of individual care managers.

Issues were raised in foster carer support groups and in the team meeting about children who have been excluded from school and the impact that this has on carers. Again, the exclusion practice in the County is beyond the control of this service and everyone who spoke to the inspectors about the problem was most concerned, but it may lead to disruptions to education for individual young people and the County Council does have overall responsibility for educating young people who are looked after. Other issues were raised about education provision when young people are remanded or bailed some distance from their home. Education provision is patchy in some instances. This is failing young people and places pressure on foster carers and on the support structure within the fostering schemes. Additionally, young people and carers feel that there is insufficient support for young people who are going into further or higher education.

Everyone’s home contains hazards, some of which may pass unnoticed by the fostering family because they are familiar with their own environment. Risk assessments on individual foster homes could be improved, and rather than use a tick-box style checklist it would be good practice to use a formal risk assessment format to identify hazards and which shows how these will be eliminated or safely managed. The standard states that the home *and immediate environment* should be free from avoidable hazards. In order to remove hazards they first have to be identified. The process for recording this does not appear to be sufficiently robust and thorough at present.

There is still a need for the increased recruitment of foster carers to improve the availability of placements and choice in matching, and to allow for children and young people to remain close to their own community. Some children and young people are still placed significant distances from their homes, which

creates difficulties with contact and continuity of educational and health provision. Placing officers also feel that some fostering households are in danger of being overstretched, and foster carers subjected to undue stress, particularly where exemptions to the registered number of children are granted. Some placing officers would also like clearer communication and working together between themselves and the fostering service when second and subsequent placements are being considered.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:**

12

There are systems in place to ensure that information about children and young people's health needs is obtained and shared with carers and that suitable health care provision is being provided. However, care needs to be exercised that all necessary health information is obtained for emergency placements without delay.

## **EVIDENCE:**

One foster carers' support group had invited a specialist nurse for children with diabetes to give a talk on care of children with diabetes. Foster carers were given the opportunity to consult with staff at the local hospital to seek advice should a child with diabetes be placed with them in an emergency.

There was evidence from individual foster carers that young people with special health needs were receiving the necessary professional interventions. In line with Standard 12.3, foster carers are given good quality information about young people coming to live with them within the family care worker scheme. Evidence was seen of detailed reports being forwarded to foster carers prior to placement.

As this is a local authority fostering service, the county's own care management staff are responsible for the quality of the health care information available. On the files seen, this was well recorded on the county's new children's services recording system and covered all identified health care needs. Personal health plans and written parental consent for emergency and prophylactic health examinations and treatment were seen on the files examined. However, in the foster carer questionnaire survey, some carers reported for some emergency placements, they had not received important information about a child's health needs, for example, about allergies, until some time after the child had been placed and although none reported that

this had caused any distress or health issue for the child, they were concerned that this might have been the case.

Some foster carers reported that they had received first aid training.

Young people report that their foster carer gives them a balanced diet and encourages them to eat healthily and to take regular exercise. They also reported that their foster carers gave them advice about keeping safe and sexual health matters.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

There are, generally, good systems in place for the assessment, approval and support of foster carers. However, more recruitment of carers is needed to ensure that adequate choice in matching is available. Also, there is still work to be done to evidence that the required information has been obtained for all persons working for the fostering service and that robust risk assessments of hazards in foster homes and their immediate environment are being undertaken and reviewed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

All seven foster homes visited were warm, homely, comfortable and well furnished. Each child or young person had their own bed and suitable bedroom. The homes visited covered a wide range of house types, localities and were a mix of small town, large town and rural placements. All were maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.

Placing officers (care managers) commented very positively on the warmth and dedication shown by foster carers, their child-focussed attitude and commitment to the children and young people in their care, particularly in times of difficulty.

Care managers feel that the foster carers are looking after children well and in line with the placement agreement and the overall care plan for the child. All

agreed that they considered the children and young people to be safe in their placements.

Foster carers are provided with a health and safety checklist and written guidance. Some social workers had simply ticked boxes to say that they had discussed the issues on the list. One social worker had written notes beside each point, which provided much better evidence that this very important issue was more than just a tick box exercise. St. 6.6 says that the environment within the foster home should be free from avoidable hazards. It is hard to see how this can be established without a formal risk assessment on the foster carer's home, and the checklist format seen did not provide sufficient evidence of a risk assessment being carried out.

At a mainstream foster carer's support group, several carers indicated that they had been involved in planning meetings to discuss possible placements. Some foster carers said that when they had been unsure as to whether they could meet the needs of the child adequately, the child had not been placed. All the foster carers visited said that considerable efforts were made to match young people to foster carers and that they had received sufficient information. Two foster carers talked about placements that had been under strain and had eventually had to end. They had received appropriate support and guidance at these very difficult times.

Unfortunately it was not possible to case track any children from minority ethnic backgrounds, and no comment can be made about matching to take into account ethnicity and cultural needs, except that all the White UK children case-tracked were placed with White UK foster carers, and there was evidence of these young people being encouraged to follow interests that they had had at home, which contributes to cultural and identity development. The responses in the children and young people's survey and discussions with parents and care managers did not highlight any unmet cultural, ethnic or religious need.

All foster carers who were asked, said that they had received training in child protection. All praised the training courses offered. Foster carers were clear about boundaries and what was not acceptable behaviour, and how to manage this, indeed some were exceptionally skilled in this respect. They said that they received excellent support from their fostering link workers and support staff.

Foster carers were aware of the procedures to be followed if the young person went missing from home.

Staff files do not yet meet the necessary standard and a requirement has been made. Specifically, there were gaps in employment history and CRB certificates have not been retained for inspection until recently. This system is changing and it is hoped that by the next inspection the matter will have been fully addressed. Unqualified staff (i.e. not qualified social workers, although some



will have NVQ 3 in Caring for Children and Young People) do supervise foster carers within the family care worker scheme, under the supervision of fostering service practice managers who, themselves, have wide experience of working with children and young people in residential care settings. Qualified social workers manage the recruitment of foster carers and conduct their annual reviews.

The fostering panel is well organised and is conducted in a business like way. Material is sent out to panel members in advance and the chair said that there had never been any difficulty with panel members coming to the meeting unprepared. In the panel meeting observed by the inspectors, the chair dealt with a very sensitive and complex issue in a highly professional manner.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

7, 13 and 31

Foster carers, generally, act as good advocates for the children and young people placed with them and try to ensure that children and young people receive the care and support and access to opportunities and services they need. Important links have been made between the service and the education service to improve support for young people who have been excluded from school, and their carer, but systems to support young people who wish to move on to further or higher education but want to remain living with their foster carer need to be improved.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The inspector saw evidence of minority group foster carers being recruited by the service. Foster carers had indicated that they had experienced no prejudice on the part of the fostering service, during the recruitment process. It is hoped that in time the service will recruit more people from minority ethnic backgrounds. At present there is only one Black foster carer in the service. As Devon has a significant minority ethnic population, this aspect of recruitment needs to be developed.

In the foster carer questionnaire survey, some foster carers confirmed that they had undertaken diversity awareness training.

Staff and foster carers were very clear about their duty to challenge discrimination against young people in their care. It was heartening to hear from one foster carer that they had complained to a bus company, whose

driver had refused twice to pick up the young person in their care for no obvious reason.

There was an ongoing issue throughout this inspection in relation to children being excluded from school, sometimes just for a lunch time period, sometimes for a day, sometimes with no time limit. There were issues around working with the schools to ensure that schools are following proper exclusion procedures. One inspector met with the education welfare officer and educational psychologist who are developing an advisory and support service for looked after children who are having problems with school, and their carers. One inspector attended a foster carer support group where these professionals met with carers to explain their roles and the support that is being provided. The foster carers clearly found this a very useful meeting and made valuable contacts to help them support their foster child in their attendance at school and other issues with their education.

It was most concerning to learn from one young person that they had not been able to attend school since being bailed to reside in another part of the County, away from their normal educational resources. Provision for this young person was piecemeal and the foster carer had been asked to attend the college with the young person due to lack of educational support, and indeed had done so to help out. The Education Department (now within the same Directorate as Social Services in Devon) makes these decisions, not the fostering service, but practice is unacceptable in this area and a requirement has been made.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

### **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

10 and 11

In conjunction with the care management service, the fostering service provides support and assistance to promote and maintain consistent and meaningful contact between children and young people and their families, although poor public transport in rural areas and the large geographical area of the county provides a challenge. Foster carers are good advocates for the children in their care and keen to ensure that the child's voice is heard.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Devon is a very large and mainly rural county with particular challenges in helping young people to maintain contact, but challenges which on the whole it meets very well by providing transport, although some young people and families have very long journeys. One young person told the inspector that the Social Services Department made good efforts to help their parents maintain contact. Both parents separately received help to do this. Contact was a major issue for this young person because they had been bailed to the other side of the county by the Court and were also prevented in the bail conditions from visiting their home area. Contact is set up by the care manager but is sometimes managed on a practical level by the foster carer, depending on the circumstances. A parent told the inspector that their son was helped to maintain contact with her, by a combination of public transport and lifts by support workers and the social worker. There was also evidence of contact being maintained between siblings.

Discussions with care managers, foster carers, young people and their parents and examination of young people's case files, also showed other excellent examples of how the care manager and foster carer are working together to ensure that children and young people maintain consistent and meaningful

contact with their parents and other family members, at suitable and safe locations, if it is not in the child's best interest, or possible, for contact to take place in the family or foster home. While a few care managers reported having had to address issues with the service about a carer's attitude to supporting a child's contact with their family, most reported that carers worked very well in promoting and supporting contact, often in difficult circumstances. Foster carers spoken to and responses in the foster carer questionnaire survey showed that carers have very good understanding of how vital it is for a child to be encouraged and assisted to maintain contact with their family and that they have a key role in this. Carers were open to promoting contact in a variety of ways (in accordance with the care plan), including hosting contact visits and review meetings in their home, telephone and written contact, and maintaining open communication with parents and other people of importance to the child. Some carers said that they have received training in "making contact work".

Throughout the inspection there was evidence of young people being consulted by carers and support workers, on day-to-day activities and education or career matters. Some foster carers were learning British Sign Language to enable them to communicate better with the child they are fostering. In their questionnaire survey responses, young people confirmed that, in general, foster carers are good about consulting with them about their day-to-day lives and their wishes and feelings. Many said that they felt treated equally within the foster family – that, it is outside of the foster family that they felt restricted or stigmatised by being in care.

The inspectors are not aware of any formal measures to consult with young people through the service.

# 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

14 and 29

There are systems in place to help young people prepare for adulthood but additional support for young people wishing to remain with their foster family while completing further and higher education is needed. Generally, the system of payments to foster carers works adequately, but there are still some reports of unacceptable delays in payments. A system for monitoring this is needed, so that effective management action can be taken to deal with particular issues that may arise.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The inspector met with two young people in their mid teens who were beginning to consider what was to happen after they ceased to be looked after. Foster carers in both instances were sensitive to issues relating to older teens and were helping to support the young people in making educational and career decisions.

Responses in the young person's survey indicated that young people generally feel that foster carers do assist them to develop independence skills in preparation for adulthood but the comments from some care managers showed that they felt that some foster carers were sometimes "overprotective" and that some young people who had moved on into supportive lodgings placements had needed to be better prepared. Some foster carers reported that they had received training on helping young people move towards independence.

Mainstream foster carers said that there are sometimes issues with payment (over and under) of expenses. They attributed this to shortcomings by individual social workers (care managers) in some instances, and in others to

the shortage of administration time. Most carers, however, said that they had not had any difficulty with payments. Journeys outside Devon, for staff and foster carers, are paid at a lower mileage rate. This may have an impact on children going for contact visits outside the county. Foster carers were also concerned about the way in which their mileage costs are reimbursed. Some journeys are not eligible for payment and if the journey to school is less than three miles, there is an expectation that the carer will walk the children to school. On narrow rural lanes this is not safe. The county is apparently reviewing its mileage rates and policy.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28

While management systems, overall, are generally sound, there are some areas which require review and improved monitoring to ensure that the best possible quality of care is being provided. There also needs to be better integration between the mainstream and specialist fostering services to ensure that best practice is equally sustained throughout the service as a whole.

## **EVIDENCE:**



At the time of the inspection, there were concerns about the freeze on vacant posts and the lack of social work, administrative and support worker time to the service. Foster carers said that already this was having some impact, as fostering link workers who were off sick long term were not being replaced on a temporary basis. Vacant posts could not be filled and the FCWS has just lost one of its two social workers. This would impact on reviews and recruitment. However, by the time the report was produced, this had changed and the posts had been unfrozen.

Foster carers were also very concerned that they were going to lose qualified social work input which they value very highly and say is a key factor in helping to maintain placements and foster carer morale, which obviously helps with foster carer retention. Foster carers feel that experienced qualified social workers are needed to provide adequate support for them, particularly foster carers with multiple placements or placements where complex court proceedings are in progress. NMS 22 clearly states that "each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support..." and, even before the vacancy freeze, this was not the case across all parts of the service.

Generally, foster carer assessments seen were detailed and comprehensive and met standard 17.6 and 17.7. However, some of the Form F's and review reports presented to the fostering panel could have been more detailed. Inspection of foster carer files and discussion with staff showed that in some cases, it was not clear what the current terms of approval for some foster carers were and, in particular, that the foster carer register was not wholly accurate. An audit of all carers' current approval terms and how this matches with the foster care agreement in place and the foster carer register needs to be undertaken. An up-to-date and accurate foster care agreement needs to be put into place and the register updated, where there are discrepancies. Any request for a significant change to a foster carer's terms of approval should be referred to the foster panel and agency decision maker and the foster carer informed of the decision in writing. Foster carers should also receive a copy of any exemption certificate issued.

No evidence was found to suggest that DCC is not a fair and competent employer. Staff being redeployed were managed in as sensitive way as possible and helped to find new posts. Out of hours support is managed by the emergency duty service – some carers feel that the response out of hours has not been good – that it has taken too long for the EDT to ring them back or that a request for a social worker to visit to help deal with a crisis has been ignored. Foster carers who said they had been contacted earlier in the day in preparation for a potential emergency placement and were waiting for confirmation of the placement said they were not informed that the crisis had been averted, or a family member found who could care for the child. In the

family care worker scheme, senior staff are on call on a rota basis until 10 p.m.

Family care worker scheme, mainstream and remand foster carers spoken to were clear about the support structure offered to them. FCWS and remand foster carers were full of praise for the quality of the support they received from within the service. They were comfortable with the support workers, who also provide monthly supervision, and said that the scheme was flexible in responding to their needs. One mainstream foster carer felt that the timing of the support groups was unfortunate as every month it clashed with a pre-existing commitment so that they never had the opportunity to attend. Other foster carers said that lack of appropriate baby-sitters was an inhibiting factor on attendance at support group meetings and many were disappointed that mainstream support workers could not help with this, as it is difficult for foster carers to find someone with the right skills and who has been assessed as safe to work with children to babysit for them.

All staff spoken to said that they received regular and effective supervision. Supervision provided to foster carers by the family care worker scheme is not undertaken by qualified social workers but foster carers said that it was most helpful and the inspector saw evidence of good recording of these sessions. A recommendation has been made under St. 22.3.

A FCWS staff meeting was observed which was very well attended. All staff at the meeting had an opportunity to raise any issues and to let their colleagues know about the work that they were undertaking.

Foster carers all said that the training provided was of a high standard, was interesting, informative and that they were encouraged to take up the training on offer to develop their skills. One foster carer said that he had been unable to complete training quickly due to other commitments, and that this held up their approval, which is correct practice (St. 23.4). All foster carers interviewed said that training was excellent. All had received training in child protection. Other foster carers said that they completed or were undertaking NVQ Level 3. Some of the training foster carers said they had undertaken included safe care, attachment theory, helping young children make sense of moving on, managing behaviour, recording skills and others. Foster carers on the training course the inspector attended felt this was an excellent course and were pleased that it had been organised for a Saturday, as this was easier for foster carers who work to attend.

The children's files seen in district offices were extensive and in some cases ran to several volumes, so it was not possible to inspect the entire file contents. All the necessary documents were present on the files seen. Some foster carers who were interviewed showed the inspector their recording, and this was kept securely in each instance.

The premises at The Gables and other fostering office are not ideal in that they are situated upstairs and do not afford access for those with a significant physical disability and wheelchair users in particular. IT systems are in place. Some sharing of IT equipment is still in place, which can create difficulties for staff writing reports. Files were seen to be securely kept within the premises.

# 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

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

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	2
<b>8</b>	3
<b>9</b>	3
<b>15</b>	1
<b>30</b>	3

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>13</b>	1
<b>31</b>	3

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS15	5, 7 and 20	The registered person must ensure that all staff files hold all of the information specified in paragraphs 1 to 7 of schedule 1. of the Fostering Services Regulations.	31/10/06
2.	FS13	13	The fostering service provider shall ensure that education provided for those children not attending school is suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs he may have.	31/10/06
3.	FS22	28	The fostering service must ensure all foster carers have an up-to-date foster care agreement, which accurately specifies the terms of the foster carer's approval with regard to number and age range of children and placements of any particular kind.	31/10/06
4.	FS25	31	The fostering service must ensure that the foster carer register accurately records the current terms of a foster carer's approval.	31/10/06

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS6	A more robust and thorough system of recording any identified hazards within a foster home and its immediate environment, and the action plan to eliminate or safely manage these, should be instigated.
2.	FS22	Each approved foster carer should be supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker.
3.	FS17	The use of exemption certificates should be very closely monitored and regularly reviewed and information about exemptions given to the fostering panel.
4.	FS17	The fostering service should ensure that the foster carer receives written notification when an exemption to the terms of their approval has been granted.

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