

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering Service**

**County Hall  
Loughborough Road  
West Bridgeford, Nottingham  
NG2 7QP**

*Lead Inspector*  
Mark Ryder

*Announced*  
18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2005

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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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

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*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** Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering

**Address** County Hall  
Loughborough Road  
West Bridgeford  
Nottingham  
NG2 7QP

**Telephone number** 0115 982 3823

**Fax number**

**Email address**

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

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Jayne Austin

**Type of registration** LAF

**No. of places registered (if applicable)** 0

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

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

NONE

**Date of last inspection** 31 March 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Nottinghamshire County Council is the eleventh largest shire authority in the country.

The fostering team is located in five district offices with eight team managers and approximately 46 staff. The main office is within West Bridgeford House where the service manager and service head are based.

The agency's Statement of Purpose clearly defines the nature of placement types provided as Mainstream, Support Care, Short Term, Emergency, Fostering futures (salaried carers), Remand, Child-Specific and mentors for all children. The fostering service also provides support services to birth families and a sitting/befriending service for children with disabilities permanently living in the community.

Nottinghamshire County fostering has 315 approved mainstream households and 65 approved short break households. In total there are 660 approved foster carers. At the time of this inspection there were 427 children in placement.

The Nominated Manager for Nottinghamshire is Jayne Austin.

# SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by three inspectors: Mark Ryder, Jane Barton and Elaine Cray. A pre-inspection visit was made to the agency on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2005.

As part of the inspection process questionnaires were sent to various interested parties. At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 25 foster carers and 12 foster children over the age of 10 years. The commission had no response from parents of young people tracked. Placing social workers for all children selected for this inspection were interviewed. Also a foster carer and young people's group was arranged on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

Verbal feedback was given on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

Retford, Gedling and West Bridgford House offices were visited during the course of this inspection. Inspectors were able to informally meet staff and a foster carer during these visits.

A sample of four carers were tracked which included visiting the children and foster carers, interviewing the placing social worker and supervising social worker. In addition inspectors reviewed the children's and carer's files. Inspectors were able to access electronic records as well as children's records, during the course of this inspection.

The agency is commended on the high standard and comprehensive content of the paperwork submitted to the Commission for Social Care Inspection prior to the inspection, which has informed this report.

This was a positive inspection with only one requirement being identified. The agency has been recommended to take action in five areas.

## What the service does well:

Inspectors were impressed with the overall quality of the service for children and young people in foster care. This is reflected in six of the standards having been scored as exceeding National Minimum Standards.

During this inspection the staff were observed to work cohesively as a team and to have good knowledge of the strengths of individual carers and of the specific needs of children and young people currently in placement.

Carers were very positive about the service they receive and the high retention level of foster carers further underlined this.

The agency has a high expectation of its carers in relation to training and provides good training opportunities, utilising staff skills as well as contracting the services of external trainers.

The agencies policies and procedures are comprehensive in their coverage and are extremely well referenced to the Fostering Regulations 2002 and to the National Minimum Standards as well as to other appropriate legislation. The agency has developed good pro-forma recording.

The management of the fostering service was considered excellent. There were a number of examples of good practice of appropriate monitoring taking place. Staff and carers made several positive comments, regarding the service manager, to inspectors during the course of this inspection.

Visits to foster homes inspected were assessed as being suitable and appropriate for the young people in placement.

Outcomes for children's education were very well developed. The agency responds to the educational needs of young people in foster care and monitors educational achievements.

Interviews with placing Social Workers established a high level of satisfaction with current placements.

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

The agency has responded positively to the last two inspections (the previous one being a monitoring visit). All requirements have been met.

All qualified staff have now been registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

The agency's premises have been upgraded and are now all appropriate to carry out the functions of a fostering service.

The information for young people has been developed over the last 12 months. The children's guides were detailed, age specific and offered a variety of information and contact details to support services.

The use of the Framework computer system provides accurate and up to date information on all aspects of social work activity. This includes childcare and foster care reviews, supervision visits and complaints.

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

There were no major shortfalls evident during this inspection.

The fostering panel was considered well organised and members were knowledgeable and professional. However some of the present systems are required to be developed to ensure that all information is available during panel discussions.

One children's file did not have necessary Looked After Children documentation. Although not the direct responsibility of the fostering service inspectors believed such information should be shared with both childcare and the fostering service to ensure consistency of practice.

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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

# Being Healthy

## The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

The fostering service provides positive outcomes for young people's continued good health and well being.

### EVIDENCE:

The foster carer agreement clearly describes the expectation that a child's health history is accurately recorded and that each carer has delegated responsibility for arranging certain health treatments for the child. Although not all carer's had written health records, diaries kept for making medical, dental and contact appointments were generally well recorded.

Placement plans and review minutes demonstrated a good level of monitoring of health care needs for each young person.

Specialist health care such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) is available for young people in foster care. There is a well established relationship with CAMHS and the fostering service.

Young people expressed positive views about how carers help them stay healthy and look after themselves. " They (*foster carers*) talk to me about my health and about my sleep", "I eat healthy food", " my foster carers give me a balanced diet and teach me ways to stay clean and stuff"

A designated nurse for children in public care supports, advices and trains carers in health care matters and also monitors the number of health assessments that each child should have. An audit of these numbers indicates a low take up due, in part, to the administrative processes social worker's need to complete and ensuring parental consent is recorded. The system is currently being reviewed to ensure a greater number of assessments being completed.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9,15,30**

Children and young people are provided with warm, safe and comfortable foster homes with trained and competent carers. Supervising social workers are well managed, qualified and possess appropriate knowledge and skills. The fostering panel was well organised but required further development to ensure it meets National Minimum Standards.

### **EVIDENCE:**

All current staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Personnel records contain most information as detailed under Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. However the service manager provided documents that all staff selected for this inspection are registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC) thus ensuring all staff had provided documents of identification.

Team managers chair annual foster carer reviews. If any concerns or potential conflicts of interest's managers will arrange to chair other teams reviews. All concerns are fed back to the panel. Team managers felt this system works well and enables managers to know the carers prior to the review process. Carers responded to questionnaires saying, " We value our relationship with the fostering service they make us feel that we do a good job".

All of the carer's homes visited during this inspection were warm and comfortable, presented as extremely child focussed and provided a high standard of care to the young people in placement. Young people spoken to

during these visits were pleased with the foster homes and the care they received. Young people's bedrooms were well decorated and personalised by the young people themselves.

Nottinghamshire fostering service has a diverse fostering community which represents the community in which it serves. The service manager's self-assessment identified that "lack of placement choice, plus high demand for placement, influences the ability to match a child with carers". This view was also expressed by some placing social workers. However Choice Protects money has been directed into increasing placement choice. The service manager believes this could develop the service by, for instance, increase in black/Asian foster carers.

A young person's questionnaire highlighted some concern regarding the type of sanctions they may have experienced by foster carers. This was immediately discussed with the service manager who agreed to check out the young person's concerns. The agency was noted to respond promptly to this situation and to establish that the young person was making the point that they had not experienced such sanctions and that they like their foster carers.

Competency based assessments were detailed, informative and open to critical scrutiny by the fostering panel and delegated decision maker. Observation of the fostering panel confirmed this. Panel membership was quorate but did not have an education representative both on this occasion and the previous Panel. The chair was experienced in childcare social work and was a senior manager from the same local authority. Recommendations and panel voting for approval were discussed with prospective carers and social worker present. Whilst this did not necessary restrict panel members from making an informed view, this practice should be reflected within the foster panel guidance. Perspective foster carer's references were not always available for panel members to read and this must be a requirement for future practice. Inspectors advised the agency that panel members should have a file with a record of the relevant recruitment checks. This also to include such information as the current Pin number of the registered nurse representing the health issues connected with the functions of the panel.

A foster carer commented: "Assessment of foster carers was fair and complete".

# Enjoying and Achieving

## **The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7,13**

Young people are offered extensive support and encouragement to attend and participate in education. Young people's cultural, religious and disability needs are well met by carers who are provided with good written guidelines by the agency.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Education is highly valued by this agency. The Education 'corporate parenting consultant' provides strategic and individual development to the service to ensure that young people have the best opportunity to achieve. This includes such as areas as developing a comprehensive Personal Education Plan (the best inspectors had seen) which are regularly reviewed and audited, provide short term home tuition targeted at young people to return to main stream school and piloting such schemes as 'taking part – out of schools learning for children in public care'. Whilst SATS and GCSE results last year were not high (this includes residential care) there were a number of examples of young people achieving very well.

Young people expressed positive views on the support they received from carers regarding education. Many young people felt that education was promoted through such examples as encouragement to complete homework or foster carers visiting the school during parents evening. One young person said: " They (*the foster carers*) will help with any homework and convince me to do well in all my classes".

Prospective carers are assessed through a competency-based assessment that includes their understanding of and commitment to anti-discriminatory practice. Carer's understanding and awareness of anti-discriminatory practice is also measured through the annual review process. Specific training for white carers of black children has recently been commissioned. Carers of disabled children are able to receive appropriate aids and adaptations to ensure placements can be met.

On one of the visits to a foster home an interpreter was required. This family had received the services of this same interpreter during the course of the young person's placement. It was clear that the agency valued such placements and ensured that any communication difficulties were addressed appropriately. Both the young person and foster carers said they felt very well supported by Nottinghamshire Fostering Service.

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

## **The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10,11**

The agency actively promotes contact with young people and consults with them on a regular basis.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers are aware of the importance of appropriate contact between young people and their birth families. Information regarding contact is regularly shared with the social worker and through the childcare review process. Looked After Children (LAC) documents on young people's files provided detailed plans on contact arrangements. The Foster Carer Agreement explicitly informs carers of the 'expectation to facilitate contact with the parents or others in accordance with the plan agreed in the Placement Agreement'.

Consultation with young people regarding their care and future is arranged through the childcare review meetings. Social workers visited the young people in placement at regular intervals to ask for their views. A number of young people said they felt listened to and were able to, for instance, to request changes in the contact arrangements.

The service manager commented that the Safe Caring Policy was amended following a meeting with 'Listen 4 A Change!' a group for children who live in foster and residential homes. Also that young people were involved in the production of the Children's Guide. A young person commented on a questionnaire that: "people listen to me like my foster carer and my social worker".

Young people were aware of the agency's complaints procedure. This was very well presented in a young people's pack with information on advocacy services and the complaints process.



# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 14,29**

Young people are encouraged to develop independent skills and are helped and supported to plan for when they leave care. Foster carers experience and skills are reflected in the level of allowances paid.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Young people said that they are encouraged to be more independent. This included help in finding college placements and apprenticeship work in local businesses. Some carer's commented that they would like training on transition to adult care. Specific training is offered for Foster Carer's on leaving care. The service manager is aware of the difficulties that young people can experience when they require adult care services. Regular consultation between the two services has begun to address some of these difficulties such as the move from fostering to adult care placements.

Foster carers automatically enter the fostering scheme when they are first approved. Mainstream carers can access, progressively, four levels of allowances depended upon their length of experience and skills they have acquired during this time. Carer's commented favourably on how the level system worked as it promotes continuous professional development.

# Management

## **The intended outcomes 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 cares 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 standard(s) 1,2,4,5,17,23,24,26**

The agency is managed and staffed by a team of qualified and experienced professionals who evidence a dedication to supervising and supporting carers to appropriately meet the needs of children and young people in placement.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency's Statement of Purpose provides full detail of its aims, objectives and working practices and a clear statement of the types of placements, which it is able to provide.

The agency produces two types of children's guides, which are age defined and provide comprehensive detail to young people about being fostered, in attractive formats and appropriate language. This was considered as exceeding national standards.

Staff from the agency had appropriate skills and knowledge of fostering practice. Placing social workers responded that the fostering staff were "friendly, child focussed and worked well with them". Liaison between childcare teams and the fostering team was well established.

The service manager is very experienced in working within statutory childcare services and has worked at a senior/managerial level for the last 8 years. The service manager possesses both professional social work and management qualifications. Extremely positive comments were received during this inspection from staff and carers regarding the service manager's leadership, management and supportive attributes.

The inspectors noted evidence of a dedication on the part of both the service manager and team managers to continuous monitoring and improvement of policies, procedures and practice with a commendable emphasis on outcomes for young people in placement.

Files in both electronic (Framework) and paper formats were appropriately stored. Computers were password protected and files were locked away in filing cabinets.

Case records were well written and files had sufficient documentation to evaluate a child's placement. Review minutes, education PEP's and medical history were clearly documented. One file inspected did not have the necessary Looked After Children documents although appropriate information for this young person was present. Inspectors asked that LAC information be completed for this young person.

The young people visited during this inspection spoke very positively about their current placements and their records evidenced that, in all cases, considerable progress had been made. Two young people said that they are treated like part of the family and are planning on going on holiday the following week. Another young person wrote that: "In my placement with my foster carers I feel safe and I am one of the family and I get to socialise with different members of the family".

Both staff members and carers confirmed that their own training and development needs were identified appropriately and that they were provided with good access to training opportunities. The inspectors examined the training records of the carers tracked during this inspection and found that training undertaken was fully appropriate to the needs of the young people currently in placement. A foster carer wrote that: "we are offered lots of initial training and given the opportunity to go on more specialist courses. Our supervising social worker encourages us to complete our NVQ training". The Nottinghamshire Foster Carers Training Plan, from the agency's Staff Development Unit for 2005/6, was very well presented, comprehensive and easily understood. Inspectors considered this an excellent document for foster carers.

Office premises on the three sites seen were well equipped and had robust administrative systems in place. There were noticeably less computer terminals available in the Retford office than with the other premises inspected. Staff and manager's were hopeful that this would be rectified shortly.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

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

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

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

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

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

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

no

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	30	27	The agency is required to present to panel all references for prospective foster carers to determine a recommendation for approval.	1.08.05

## 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.	24	The agency is recommended to ensure that all LAC documentation is available on files for children placed with the agency's foster carers.
2.	26	The agency is recommended to provide sufficient computer terminals for staff in the Retford office.
3.	30	The agency is recommended that individual files are kept for all panel members including copies of references, CRB's and, where appropriate, current PIN or Registration numbers for professions such as nursing and social work
4.	30	The agency is recommended to ensure that a member with an educational background is represented on the fostering panel on a frequent basis.
5.	30	The agency is recommended to include in the foster panel guidance that discussion and voting to recommend approval is an open process with prospective foster carers and social workers present.



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