



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Walsall MBC Fostering Service

**Children`s Resources
Walsall MBC, Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1RG**

Lead Inspector
Chris Fuller

Announced Inspection
13th November 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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Walsall MBC Fostering Service
Address	Children`s Resources Walsall MBC, Civic Centre Darwall Street Walsall WS1 1RG
Telephone number	01922 658239
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Walsall MBC
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: NA

Date of last inspection 27.02.06

Brief Description of the Service:

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council is committed to the development of a comprehensive fostering service to children/young people and their families. The local authority aims to recruit foster carers from as broad a representation of the community as possible, in order to meet these diverse needs. The main task of the fostering service is to provide children/young people with family placements. This is achieved through the recruitment, assessment, training, preparation and support of a wide range of prospective foster carers.

The statement of purpose includes details of the fostering service. provides a range of placements. The February Post Panel Summary of service provision stated including 87 Temporary, 44 Permanent and 10 Short Break. It currently provides 251 placements for children and young people (excluding short term breaks). There are 149 Resource carers (including 8 back-up carers) these provide a running total of 251 placements. The 10 short-term break carers provide 15 placements for short-term breaks. Placements are provided by 149 approved foster carers of which 13 are African/Caribbean, 4 are Indian, 3 are Pakistani, 3 are dual heritage and 126 are White/European.

During the past inspection year April 2005 to March 2006 there have been 17 new approvals with 27 placements gained and 15 closures with 23 placements lost.

The carers are supported by one strategic manager children's resources, manager family placement services (a new post) and three team managers, 7.5 senior practitioners, 18.5 qualified social workers, 5.75 family support officers; a training officer, a marketing officer, a peer support development officer, 2 family assessment officers and a co-ordinator of foster carer reviews.

The two fostering teams, the Recruitment and Training team and the Fostering Support and Development support team provide and support the whole range of placements, including emergency, temporary and long term/permanent placements for children and young people aged between 0 and 18 years. The Fostering Service also has a permanence support team providing support to Permanent Foster Carers, Family and Friend Carers and Adoption support cases.

In addition, the service offers short-term breaks and a matching service for children with disabilities. Specific arrangements have been made to meet the particular requirements of individual children, including structural alterations, aids, adaptations and personal support.

Other aspects of the service are the provision of a single referral point for referrals for all types of placements of looked after children, excluding short-term breaks, which go through a referral meeting process. Matching is an important aspect of the service for in house resources, external and out of borough placements.

Walsall fostering service offers the opportunity to foster carers for career development and a professional fee. Training is promoted by the organisation through a comprehensive training/development programme established by the training officer. A dedicated supervising social worker provides ongoing supervision and support to the foster carers to carry out the fostering task. Annual reviews of foster carers are completed.

SUMMARY

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

The three inspectors planned a visit to the offices of the fostering service and to several foster homes with the help of the manager, Louise. The visit was made over a period of a week. The manager, Louise was very helpful and provided a lot of written information before the visit began. She also wrote to the inspector and told her what she thought the home did well and what they could improve.

The inspector also

- used other information, which she already knew about the home.
- visited the foster carers centre, the fostering panel and the new foster carers recruitment shop
- read the records
- spoke with staff and panel members
- Saw how young people and foster carers got on with each other

The inspectors were very pleased to receive a lot of feedback questionnaires from 26 children and young people, 34 foster carers, 1 other professional and 20 social workers. Some of the comments about the service are included in the report. The inspectors would like to thank all those involved for their co-operation and hospitality.

If you want to get a full picture of what a fostering service is like you might want to read the last report as well. You can ask the inspector for a copy.

What the service does well:

These are some of the good things that the inspector found out about the fostering service.

The Walsall Fostering Service management and staff team have a good mix of skills and knowledge and this means they are able to do their jobs in an efficient and effective way.

The fostering service team are successful in establishing a good working relationships with foster carers to provide suitable family placements for children and young people of Walsall. One young person stated " They look after me well, I am very happy here." Another said "My family always made me feel well cared for. They are always there for me and they always tell me that they love me."

The foster carers feel well supported by their link workers with comments such as " I have a very good working relationship with my link worker who offers advice and support when ever I need it." "I have once a month supervision if I need advice in any way I know there is always someone at the end of the phone to talk to." Good supervision and support systems have been developed for foster carers these help link workers and management monitor and promote good practice.

In the same way the fostering service staff stated they feel well supported and consulted and appreciate the opportunities for development and secondment.

There is an excellent resource of knowledgeable and experienced foster carers with good networks in local communities. A placing officer stated " Foster carers and their link workers have communicated with other professionals and family members to address issues that might affect the stability of placements."

The Walsall Foster Carers Association represents and encourages foster carers to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the role of the foster carer and the service.

There are clear beneficial outcomes for looked after children from the corporate parenting approach with effective partnerships between education, health, housing and social care. For example the development and provision of suitable premises, access and equipment for short term care placements and the successful outcomes of the achieving excellence project.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Children's Guide to fostering has been finished. It is well presented with lots of useful information and telephone numbers. The layout is good with some great quotes such as " Did you know? Kelly Holmes, gold medal winner in athletics, went into foster care twice." The back page of the guide tells you that the leaflets can be made available in large print, audio tape and in other languages.

Great progress has been made with a format for the fostering placement agreement finished and being used by foster carers, link workers and social workers. This has improved a lot of information sharing and means everyone can be clear about the reason for the placement and who has got to do what to make it work.

The senior management team have been successful in re locating the office for the fostering service so that the management and staff have somewhere safe and suitable to work while their old offices are being improved and redecorated.

There has been some progress made with contracted services ranging from cleaning of the premises, taxis used for transport of looked after children and providers of staff/carers for contact arrangements. The contractors have been asked to improve the service they are providing so that they meet their side of the contract. There will be new contracts drawn up in the new year and it will be checked that the service provided is the service that has been paid for.

The fostering service has tried lots of new ways to get the right staff to work with the team and do make sure that the people they employ are the most suitable and skilled people for the job such as staff for the short-term break scheme and other social work staff.

The management have produced some guidance for staff of the status of qualified and unqualified staff with clear guidelines for definition of social work tasks. This means there is a clear criteria so that they can show and check the amount of involvement of a qualified worker.

The fostering service have successfully launched the "walk-in centre" in a town centre venue in Freer Street placing marketing and recruitment in the heart of the community of Walsall.

The Foster Care Association continues to build on a good working partnership with Walsall fostering service. Excellent progress has been made by the peer group support worker working closely with the committee members and in general with foster carers.

The Foster Care Association has made excellent progress in opening a centre for Foster Carers at the Ryecroft Community Centre. This is an exciting development for foster carers in Walsall with the prospect of providing benefits to all aspects of the service provision and ultimately for Looked After Children.

The training officer continues to provide a comprehensive training programme for foster carers. This reflects the development and learning needs of the foster carers. Due consideration is given to specific needs and suitable training identified.

There continues to be good progress with the delivery and achievement of NVQ for foster carers, staff and management.

Most significantly there has been an improvement to the service provision to Family and Friends foster carers said " We have always felt we have had the support from social services ever since having the children placed. It is the same now with the fostering service they have just been great and as the children grow up we are thinking about being mainstream foster carers". All of the family and friend foster carers are now allocated a link worker and the majority have had a review during the past inspection year.

What they could do better:

Although the fostering service did some things well there were things that could make the children safer. The important ones are:

One matter still needs to be looked at by all that work in the service; the administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement must be improved to make sure information is up to date and accurate. The errors in names and addresses etc could lead to all sorts of problems for looked after children both in the daily running of the service and historically, over a period of time.

All of the fostering service staff must make sure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files. There has been some improvement in the structure of files but the content should be audited to check the records are right and meaningful.

The responsible person and the fostering service must ensure that priority is given to developing suitable policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service that addresses and recognises the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent

The fostering service promotes the development and health of children and young people in foster care. They are encouraged by foster carers to access relevant health services and to follow healthy lifestyles.

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

EVIDENCE:

Walsall's Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership has a five-year plan based on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters. One of the aims is to reduce levels of poor health and to promotion of healthy lifestyles. This is achieved through early intervention. This is being done by setting up a data base, improving the availability of information and guidance, implementing a key worker system, improving the way services are delivered through early intervention and child health promotion through the role of the School Health Advisor. The plan has clear objectives and timescales and involves interagency working and commitment. Already it has impacted on the Fostering Service provision through provision of new records, the Looked After Children Nurse, recording of the medical history of each child looked after, annual medicals and health checks. This permeates all services through to encouraging healthy eating and lifestyles and raising awareness of foster carers.

The appointment of the Looked After Children Nurse is having a positive impact on health service networking and outcomes for children's health. Medicals can be arranged to take into consideration individual circumstances and needs of the child.

The format for the individual child care records held and completed by foster carers has been improved and provides a comprehensive record of a child's care needs in line with "Every Child Matters" and incorporates the health records for each child placed. A sample of records seen show that visits to doctors, dentist and optician's etc are all recorded. One parent stated "They are excellent because if my child is ill they take the child to the doctors and opticians and even check ups at the dentists."

There is also a history of immunisations and any illnesses and or treatments. Consent to medical treatment is usually obtained at the time of completion of the Looked After Children documents. The social worker for the child will obtain these where and when necessary. This is also covered in the fostering placement agreement. Children and young people are encouraged by foster carers to take part in reviews and progress with their health and well being is always considered and any future action to be planned.

If children are prescribed treatment foster carers keep a record of the details about children's medication. This was also recorded on foster carers supervision notes when this is monitored by the link worker. The foster carers liaise closely with health care professionals and the school nurse. Some of the more experienced foster carers have excellent network systems and working relationships with health care staff.

Training is provided to foster carers in respect of special health care needs of children in placement. In particular foster carers providing short-term breaks are able to meet a range of medical care needs; this may include invasive medication. The registered person confirmed that these duties are covered under the local authority fostering service public liability insurance.

A new health representative has been appointed on the fostering panel who acts as health advisor to the panel. Another development has been the designation of one member of staff to fulfil the health and safety assessments of the foster carer premises. Many issues should be identified and addressed at an early stage prior to applications and reviews going to panel. This has been done to develop expertise in this area and to standardise expectations and judgements in this topic.

The fostering service is makes timely and appropriate notifications of any accidents and or serious illness and takes appropriate action to protect the health and well being of children and young people in foster care.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3,6,8,9,15 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is good

There are good recruitment and employment systems that provide suitable foster carers and staff to work with children and young people. The service has strategies to address resource limitations as they strive to achieve appropriate matching of placements and effective care planning to safeguard the well being of children and young people.

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

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has a strong management structure for the service. A new manager was appointed to the Permanence Support Team. The management team have proved formidable in developing the service in an open, creative and inclusive style. There were several examples of strategic planning across services and constructive partnerships with health and or education services to achieve outcomes for children and young people.

It was also evident that staff at all levels understand their role and responsibility in relation to the overall service objectives.

The fostering service and senior management team also have good networks with the other authorities forming the West Midlands Consortium. This provides a forum for sharing and standardising good practice and resources. An example of this is "the Celebrating Culture Day" hosted by Walsall Local Authority which was a great success for all involved.

At all times the protection, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people remain the primary function of the service. Systems are in place to ensure all of the required checks and references are done to ensure satisfactory clearance of management, staff and foster carers. Records are held centrally at the Civic Centre or Tameway Tower but were made available upon request.

The Marketing and recruitment team have revised the selection process for foster carers to ensure at the initial enquiry stage they check out that the prospective applicant has a spare room available. They are made aware through written information and discussion that they will be expected to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. All carers devise their own safer caring policy when they are initially assessed and this is reviewed when a child is placed and at the foster carer review. The fostering service has designated a member of staff as a health and safety lead who completes all of the health and safety assessments. There has been a review of the recording format to ensure the assessment covers any individual environmental issues. This has led to an improvement in the information going to panel with far fewer issues being highlighted at the approval stage. Foster carers also receive training in health and safety issues and guidance is included in the Foster Carers Handbook. The Fostering panel members are thorough in monitoring the quality of assessments brought to panel and issues relating to safety of pets, ponds and room sharing were being considered both in terms of individual assessments but also for service policy and procedures.

The matching children with cares process has been improved with recording formats such as referral form being revised and with the implementation of the foster placement agreement. The service makes sure that detailed written records are kept on each child/young person's records of the assessment undertaken and outcome. This includes the views and wishes of the child/young person in accordance with their age and level of understanding.

Feedback from placing officers and parents is that they recognise there are limitations to the range of placements available and that the best possible choice is made at the placement planning stage. "Liaison is usually good and every effort is made to secure a suitable placement with the limited resources available." "They do a reasonable job in difficult times." Fostering Panel minutes indicate there are fewer variations and exemptions. Also the single referral unit provides a framework for pro-active placement planning and dual tracking for looked after children. The panel had also been issued with an overview of the Green Paper, Care matters: Transforming the Lives of children in care(LgiU) to keep them informed of recent developments and proposals.

A foster placement agreement has been developed and implemented. This helps to formally identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. Although only a small number of placements as yet have used this format the feedback from those participating is positive. Discussion with foster carers highlighted their awareness of the racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs of children and young people placed with them. The information available prior to placement varies tremendously depending upon the nature of the placement and is frequently far more readily available for the short term breaks for children with disabilities where there is a clear expectation from all parties that the detailed information should be made available. Foster carers are encouraging children and young people to keep their own life story work and items to take with them upon leaving the placement. The New Skills to Foster preparation course provides comprehensive pre-approval training of a high standard with an emphasis on the need to value children's heritage and encourage carers to help children gain self confidence and pride.

The fostering service has updated their comprehensive policy and procedures for the service to looked after children and these are contained in the Child Care Practice manual and electronically. Staff and foster carers receive training in respect of safeguarding the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. "Telling" Workshops to assist all types of permanent carers to support children and young people with developing a positive level of self are being developed within the Permanent support team. Where incidents and events occur there are clear procedures for action to be taken and all relevant persons are notified. In August 2006, the Family Placement Service held an away day to explore the issues around safer caring. This produced a consensus across the service in terms of policies, procedure and practice in relation to safer care in its broadest sense.

Foster carer training continues to be delivered in relation to allegations against foster carers, recording and safer care. More work is being done in this area following recent publication of recommendations for best practice from the Fostering network.

The Fostering service management have been successful in developing a staffing structure with designated posts having specific roles and responsibilities and job specifications reflecting the specialist skills, knowledge and experience required. Staff hold the required qualifications and two additional trainee posts have been provided for staff development. A number of unqualified staff from residential services have joined the team on a secondment basis to meet the service needs and to broaden their skills and experience. For example staff have been appointed with skills in marketing and recruitment to develop an effective and efficient recruitment programme. There are qualified staff to complete the assessment of prospective foster carers and a team of staff that provide link worker support. A training officer has developed a comprehensive training programme and works closely with foster carers and fostering service teams to make sure this reflects learning and development needs. Staff recruitment files were seen to be well ordered with relevant documents and a useful front sheet to keep an audit trail of references received and satisfactory. It would be helpful if the front sheet recorded the start and end date of the period of employment. A sample of files seen were found to be well organised and complete. Verbal references are obtained prior to making the appointment. Other records included details of qualifications, references, letters confirming continuous service, letters of appointment, salary and job descriptions.

The manager provide in the pre inspection information a copy of a service document outlining the management, utilisation and Support of None Social Work Qualified Staff. This document has been produced to clarify the procedures regarding the status of qualified and unqualified staff with clear guidelines for definition of social work tasks. This was important due to the number of unqualified staff employed and so staff would be clear about duties and responsibilities.

One of the foster carers explained " the assessment worker involved the foster carers child in the assessment, everybody in the family was interviewed my niece and her boyfriend etc." It was noted on one of the foster carers files that the carers own child had become 16ys old but a CRB check had not been completed. This was discussed with the manager who agreed a system needed to be put in place to flag this up. The inspectors spoke with administration staff that have responsibility for the spreadsheet that records all of the recruitment information. Managers view staff records and CRB's and

link workers view the foster carers and sign off. A check is also done for other authorities with carers who live in Walsall.

The SOSCISS and PARIS databases are also checked for any indicators of concern. The clearances are kept for 2 years and then destroyed. There is no flagging system at the moment. All disclosures are logged onto an Excel tracking sheet. If the disclosure is clear a pink form is issued and it is signed by the responsible individual and then returned to the fostering team. If the CRB is not clear the allocated social worker views the disclosure and makes the notes. The applicant is visited and the incident discussed and then a recommendation is made to the responsible individual who makes the final decision. CRB's are done every three years and kept for six months. The Excel Spreadsheet flags up red after 6 months the original document is then shredded and the date noted.

The manager provided copies of the last three fostering panel meeting minutes and the papers for the November fostering panel meeting. This was observed and the inspector met with the independent chair of the panel.

The policy and procedures about the operation of the fostering panel reflect the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. These are included in the Tri X system for the Child Care Manual. Information has also been provided in the foster carers handbook. These make clear the functions and responsibility for decision-making.

The composition of panel members reflects the regulations and the national minimum standards. During the past inspection year there have been some changes in panel membership with an independent Chairperson from a neighbouring borough to provide an independent voice and objectivity. The medical expert, the Health Co-ordinator for looked after children retired and has now been replaced. There is still a councillor member vacancy and it is hoped to recruit to this position.

Other members consisted of one new fostering service social worker, one children's home manager and one fostering service manager advisor to the panel. There are four independent members including a new member with health background, child protection and reviewing officer, a foster carer from another authority and an education representative. One former young person in care is also becoming established as a participating member.

The panel minutes and the Chair confirmed the panel has consistently met the quorate membership requirements. With a lot of business to cover there are additional meetings planned in over the twelvemonth period. There has been an improvement with the new independent members regularly in attendance. Panel members appeared conversant with their duties and responsibilities and confident to make informed contributions and ask questions for clarification or raise issues.

The fostering panel administrator has improved the presentation and preparation of panel documents and panel minutes. The latter were clear well laid out and formatted. The chair and panel members acknowledged good practice and comprehensive assessments prepared by fostering service staff and also the skills and knowledge of foster carers either in attendance or by letter. Equally the panel members gave positive criticism and asked pertinent questions about errors, gaps in information or process. Generally however the quality of reports prepared by the fostering agency staff for panel is good; being thorough and accurate with all relevant areas detailed for discussion.

The panel had requested training on the preparation training delivered to applicant foster carers and this was delivered in September 2006. A project group has been set up to revise the policy and procedures and to review the panel recommendation and decision making process to ensure robustness in this area. The vice chair has been extremely supportive to the new chairperson and together with the assistance received from the fostering service advisor has provided a smooth transition and continued flow of a very busy fostering panel.

The panel continue to receive management information relating to the Fostering Service functions.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is good

The fostering service recognises shortfalls and continues to raise awareness and take action to promote diversity and disability aspects of the service delivery. The fostering placement agreement and effective positive planning and working with the education department and schools have contributed to achieving outcomes for children and young people.

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

EVIDENCE:

Walsall local authority children services hosted the celebrating cultural diversity event in October 2007. This represents an annual event whereby participating local authorities of the West Midlands Consortium join together to share their experiences, resources and information relating to culture and diversity. Looked After Children/young people took part in a range of activities and presentations to explore and express their views in respect of celebrating diversity. There is a respect group for Looked After Children where they are encouraged to attend and express their views and opinions.

The newly implemented fostering placement agreement gathers information in respect of children/young people needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, Culture, disability and sexuality and ensures that all aspects are addressed.

Foster Carers and social workers receive training and guidance in respect of promoting equality and understanding cultural diversity issues. The implementation of the new Skills to Foster preparation course emphasizes the need to value children's heritage and encourage carers to help children gain self confidence and pride. "Telling" Workshops assists all types of permanent carers to support children/young people with developing a positive level of self are being developed in the Permanent Support Team. The fostering service develops specific groups to support Black and Asian foster carers and a Men in fostering group.

The fostering service at a very basic level gather management information to present to fostering panel listing and analysis of the carer population in terms of ethnicity. At the present time there are 104 White/European, 11 African Caribbean, 4 Indian, 2 Pakistani and 3 Mixed Ethnicity.

It is generally recognised by all parts of the service that there are limited resources and therefore at times limited potential for matching of placements. Any mismatch is due to lack of placements or insufficient information at the time of placement. Once again the foster placement agreement should go some way to identify these shortfalls and allow for the issues to be addressed.

This is generally a very good service with clear approval categories and a reduction in the number of variations and exemptions. The fostering service has a written policy and practice guidance in relation to room sharing, which is to be shared with carers and implemented over the next twelvemonths. The aim is to further develop the principle of privacy and dignity and self respect for looked after children/young people.

The Children's service have a good track record in respect of the education aspect of care for Looked After Children. Generally feedback indicates the outcomes for children/young people is positive. "They support my child very well in achieving education because my child has passed exams and is going on to college." And "my foster carer is always telling me to stick in at school/college and also, if needed will help me with my work as my foster dad is a trained mechanic and I am at college training to be a mechanic."

The foster carer's role in school contact, e.g. parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan are now clearly laid out in the foster placement agreements. The service makes sure that foster carers are provided with clear information, which forms part of the foster placement agreement, of who holds responsibility for giving consent to take part in such trips.

The fostering service wants to look at putting a computer in foster homes SAM learning program for young people in schools and extend to all foster homes and some already have this facility.

There has been a significant change in the service to Short term Break foster carers during the past inspection year due to a vacant post for the link worker. Feedback, and records seen indicate that generally there has been limited support and supervision available during the past inspection year. There have been a number of recruitment campaigns to employ a suitable experienced and qualified staff for the short-term break scheme. In recent weeks a new person has been appointed.

To compound this it had been identified at the last inspection that the contracted services for children with disabilities was unsatisfactory with staff not available to make visits in the evenings and at weekends when children/young people were in placement. A senior manager explained this contractual arrangement for the Case management of the children is under review as the contract is due for renewal. In the meantime there have been discussions and expectation of the service agreement outcomes clarified to ensure they meet the service needs for children and foster carers.

Reviews for children/young people with disabilities receiving the Short Term Break Service highlight the issues of lack of visits from child's social workers and lots of young people unallocated social workers

Meetings are taking place with the current contractors to address the issues such as: problems retaining staff, unskilled staff and limited training opportunities. The new contracts due in April 2007 will ensure these matters are addressed and the quality of service is monitored.

In the meantime feedback from foster carers, parents and children/young people indicate that those receiving well established placements have continued to work well together to maintain a respite service for children/young people with disabilities and their families.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good

Efforts have been made to address contractual arrangements to ensure the contact arrangements are provided in a positive, safe and effective manner. A range of methods are used and opportunities provided for children, young people and their representatives to express their opinions and views and contribute to development of the service.

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

EVIDENCE:

Progress has been made with the promotion of positive contact arrangements for children and young people. The newly implemented foster placement agreement records detailed information regarding contact arrangements for the child/young person. Any shortfalls in resources such as the child/young person daily routines, foster carer availability, transport and escort or supervision arrangements can be identified and addressed.

The completion of the foster placement agreement ensures that contact does not take place until the child's social worker has carried out a risk assessment and arrangements made for any supervision that is needed.

The existing contracting arrangements are due for renewal. The senior management team have used the opportunity to establish clear requirements for the service to ensure contracted services provide staff/carers for supervision of contact arrangements that are suitable and consistent.

The existing contracting arrangements for taxi and escort services are due for renewal. The senior management team have used the opportunity to establish clear requirements for the service to ensure contracted services are suitable and consistent. The taxi /escort arrangements of the contact system were causing major problems for the contact arrangements at the last inspection. Most of the foster carers visited were complaining about the contact service provided. The children's service and fostering service management have had a working party and have now received tenders from other companies. It has been agreed to give the contact work to a different contractor. The new system will go via transport section; any concerns from staff or foster carers will be made to the transport department. Transport section will then discuss the problem with the contractor and ultimately end the contract if they are unable to satisfactorily address the concerns. There were lots of concerns from social workers and carers regarding the confidential information that was often shared with contact workers. And the professionalism in how they dealt with the information they received. We spend a fortune on contact and taxis and we go via contact agencies. The contact for court proceedings very different and we need an expertise to maintain and supervise contact and if necessary is able to appear in court. We have been receiving a variable quality of service. The new contract is due to start on the first of January 2007. The service aims to have control of the contract arrangements and the quality of the service purchased in order to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the children/young people.

The Children's services have appointed a children's participation officer to address the issue of engaging and involving children/young people in reviewing and developing the services provided for them. There has been significant progress with the production and implementation of the children's file and recording formats held by the foster carer. These have been developed and standardised to include the participation of children and young people with prompts for their views to be sought and appropriate records kept. Another new development has been the production of a Children's guide to fostering that provides a list of telephone numbers of a range of service where children/young people can find support advice and guidance.

The statutory consultation for developing and reviewing care plans takes place on a regular basis. Foster carers and child's social workers encourage children/young people to join in for all or part of meetings and express their views.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

Quality in this outcome area has not been assessed on this occasion.

A judgement has not been made on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

The two standards above 14 and 29 were inspected at the previous inspection in March 2006 and were found to be met. The reader should consult the fostering service for more up to date information.

The registered manager confirmed that the recommendation from the previous inspection has been met. Operational management across the service has agreed there should be a period of joint work where the involvement of both the childcare social worker and the Leaving Care worker continues to ensure that carers understand the changing requirements of supporting the placed child towards adulthood.

The recommendation that the information system of the Transition & Leaving Care team should have an information system on education needs that dovetails with that of the Education Support team, so that carers can continue to support placed children's educational needs has been met.

Consideration has been given and action taken to involve finance staff in the induction training of carers.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1,4,16,17,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26 and 32

Quality in this outcome area is good

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

The fostering service has many examples of good strategic and operational management. Effective systems have been or are being set up to make sure they provide a good quality service for foster carers and thereby deliver outcomes for children and young people. The staff and foster carers demonstrate a commitment and enthusiasm to caring for children and young people. Progress has been made with plans to improve the premises for the fostering service. Two new resources raise the profile of the fostering service and provide a point of contact with the local community

EVIDENCE:

A copy of the statement of purpose was provided with the pre-inspection information. This was revised in January 2006 and gives a description of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, the management structure and a statement of the services and facilities to be provided. The fostering service team has produced a Children's Guide to fostering which includes the following; a summary of what the Service sets out to do, information for the child on how to access independent advocacy, how to complain and the contact details for CSCI. The back page of the Guide explains that it is available in different formats such as large print, audio-tape or in any other format or another language a contact for the Public information officer is provided. The guide is well presented and information readily accessible.

The fostering service is developing clear procedures for monitoring and controlling all aspects of the service to make sure there is good quality performance in all areas. This is done through a range of monitoring systems at all levels of the service.

The Information technology systems are not fully operational and this does cause a delay or in some instances means management monitoring information is not available. A new system called PARIS is due to be set up and already staff have been identified to take a lead for inputting certain information. The data stored will help the management to analyse information and to know what is effective and where there are shortfalls.

For example the recruitment and marketing team record significant data regarding recruitment strategies, drop out rates and reasons why; this information could underpin the marketing strategy. Meetings are held with management to share the information gathered and clear processes of planning, action, monitoring and review are established. Other sources of information come from the reviewing officers reports following the annual review of foster carers and monthly management feedback for the fostering panel. Other sources and levels of monitoring of the service is through

statutory review for looked after children and foster carer and staff supervision records and health and safety assessments however as yet there is no formal collation of information from the latter.

The senior management team have developed a strong organisational structure with a range of strategic posts in additions to those of the core service. This provides a staff group with specific knowledge, skills and experience in the duties and responsibilities of their posts. During the past year the most significant additions to the team have been a fostering support team manager, two customer service assistants and more recently the appointment to the short term break co-ordinator. The service has also provided secondment opportunities for staff from the residential care sector and trainee social worker posts. There have been a number of recruitment drives however there continue to be some vacancies. Most recently the service has been proactive in recruitment of staff and sought skilled and qualified staff from United States of America. Progress made over the past twelvemonths means a reduction in the number of agency staff being used. The team manager allocates workloads and monitors through supervision. The fostering service operates with a dedicated duty worker; this relieves some of the pressure on link workers. Feedback is provided for sickness absences on a three monthly basis and these records are summarised at the end of March.

The Fostering service does employ unqualified staff both as trainee social workers and as family support officers. The management team have produced guidance for staff of the role and responsibilities of the unqualified worker and clarified tasks with social work responsibility and of the unqualified workers role in respect of supervision, workload. For example the supervising link worker is responsible for completing and presenting review reports & attending relevant meetings. Practice has been that initially, the unqualified social worker is accompanied on visits and to meetings by another qualified worker, or manager. However, the unqualified social worker now attends most meetings alone unless it is agreed that the issues being raised requires the presence of a more experienced worker.

There has been a considerable challenge for administration staff with the transfer of all paperwork and systems to different premises whilst continuing the day to day running of the service. Administrators have worked well with staff and management to achieve particularly as timescales were set back and revised. Administration support has improved with newly appointed permanent staff settling into posts. The appointment of a new senior administration officer, a designated officer for panel have also contributed to improved organisation of the office work. A new post has been created to provide administration support to the team managers. The administration is well ordered and supports the work of the team. The files and records were

clearly labelled and readily accessible with files indexed and generally complete. This would indicate there is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support for the fostering service. All three teams and administration are sited together however a small group of five staff are based in the "drop in centre."

The feedback from fostering service staff and placing officer's indicates there is a reasonable working relationship between the two teams. Efforts have been made by the Fostering service to launch new initiatives such as the fostering placement agreement and keep the placing officer team's informed of the fostering service functions and the expectations of placing officer role. A placing officer stated "the fostering service works effectively with other professionals to enable the placement to succeed." And " Liaison is usually good and every effort is made to secure a suitable placement with the limited resources available."

All staff have computer monitors and can access the policy and procedures through the TRI- X programme. They are also advised of health and safety matters and at the time of appointment receive all the relevant information pertinent to the post such as contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.

Implementation of the fostering placement agreement needs the support and commitment of both teams and the foster carers to prioritise attendance at a meeting to discuss and agree the terms of the agreement. This should then provide clarity about the expectations of all parties involved and enable the foster carers to adequately support the placement plan and positive outcomes for children and young people.

The registered manger explained that the supervision policy is a corporate policy rather than service specific. The maximum frequency between supervisions is now included in section 4 ('Frequency/Duration') of the supervision policy. The staff team confirmed they receive regular supervision and support from management. The team also find the away days useful to focus on service delivery and planning to meet outcomes for children and young people.

The guidance for unqualified staff has clarified the difference in duties and responsibilities and when qualified social worker support and decision making is required.

The three different inductions offered have been stream lined to provide a more meaningful introduction to the workplace and job responsibilities.

A copy of the National Minimum Standards is available to all foster carers through the foster carers association and on line. If there are specific topic areas of interest link workers will provide this information at the time of

supervision. Link workers make regular visits and maintain telephone contact with foster carers. All contact is recorded in contact sheets and supervision records. The supervision record formats have useful headings that ensure all aspects of the foster carers role are listed for discussion and review including the needs of children in placement. Link workers are asked to take a sample of link worker files into their supervision and these are monitored through the line manager.

A major area of development that exceeds the minimum standard has been through the foster carer association who have developed their own foster care association centre independently of the fostering service. They have been supported in this venture by the peer group support worker. The association had achieved Charitable Status and went on to launch the headquarters for the Foster Care Association in October 2007. The Chair of the association said "This base will be used by our existing carers for practical support and advice, including legal representation, the use of an IT suite and beginners courses in IT." The chair acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the nine strong committee members and the peer support officer that made the venture a success. It is recognised that the centre is for all foster carers and the association is eager they should all be involved in exploring how access to and use of the facilities can be developed.

Support is also available through other foster carers. "Small local groups will meet for coffee and there is an opportunity to meet and chat with carers on Courses." "I have been to the support group at Stroud Avenue the last speaker was about life story work."

Progress has been made in 2006 with the new documents issued out to all foster carers. There had been some concerns regarding child protection. The fostering service and Children's Service could work "smarter". Foster carers frequently felt totally cut off from the support of their link workers. Now an independent social worker will be appointed when the allegation/complaints/concern is made and the service pays for access to support.

An independent support service has been identified and provided to foster carers with the opportunity to discuss their concerns in relation to complaints and allegations of abuse. This is an improvement on previous practice and address the dilemmas for Link workers in fulfil a support role as a member of the investigating authority. Feedback from foster carers regarding support received has been positive.

One foster carer stated "I think things are better now we are all members of the fostering network and I think we get more support if complaints are made." "The manager of the fostering service was lovely to me she tried to put my mind at rest and she came with me to panel."

Training in respect of complaints concerns and allegations has also improved foster carers understanding of process and expectations regarding support available. More work is being done to revise the complaint and develop training packs. There is also work being done on a new pack for carers with a focus on child protection. I meet with the working group to learn from complaints look at the impact, for example training etc.

The training officer was interviewed and provided written information for the inspectors. There continues to be good progress made with the training provided to Foster Carers and this is an area that exceeds the minimum standard through the mapping of foster carers needs, learning support to foster carers, management of resources and liaison with other agencies and services. The local authority children's services training officer joins the fostering service officer every 3rd supervision session. This provides an opportunity to dovetail any available training and share information of training needs and resources available. The training officers role has two responsibilities the foster carers training programme and the NVQ qualifications. One of the support team staff has the assessor's award and three foster carers are also assessors. Some foster carers have experienced difficulties with the change of NVQ assessors, "I am very disappointed with My assessor who is too busy to see me and has not called." However the training officer is helpful and has sorted this out.

The training officer is continuing to develop the information and resources for foster carers and respond to specific aspects of service delivery such as a new draft leaflet for Family and Friends and collating "out and about" external training information. The leaflet provides an introduction, contact number and a list of Training topics with brief description. There is an induction course for foster carers and where possible new social work staff. They then go on to a mandatory programme of training over a period of two years.

There are specific courses to meet children needs. An excellent course valued by foster carers is Life Story work and this is done jointly with social workers. Other courses include Speakeasy – how to communicate with and ascertain the views of children and Young People. A successful course has been Men in foster care from which it is proposed to set up a men's support group and one of the course members will go on to do the City and Guilds 730 training the trainers course. Two specialist midwives deliver drug and alcohol related training.

The training officer has developed a database of all carers and training undertaken. This is updated 6 monthly. Foster carers have requested that

training they attend at their place of work should also be recorded and this is being considered.

Foster carers confirmed they have training opportunities and specifically mentioned the following: Working with troubled children and their educational needs. Training information is sent through and foster carers nominate themselves. This can be difficult to attend due to commitments with children in placement such as contact arrangements, escort to school and appointments or care planning meetings , reviews etc. The training programme has been adjusted to reflect foster carers availability and foster carers are encouraged to raise any particular obstacles with their link worker or training officer so these may be addressed.

A sample of children's files were seen and there was some improvement in the records held. The relevant and current information was available in respect of the following: Looked After Children Care Plan/ Review of arrangements, Looked After Children Essential Information parts one and two, Placement plan part one and two, Medical checks, Young peoples profile and Daily records. There were Personal Educational Plans held on file but not all of these were current.

The Foster Carers had recently been issued with new children's file and recording system and those that had started to use these gave positive feedback saying they were not as cumbersome as they had thought they would be. There is a file for each child including a record of day-to-day events in the daily log for Contact visits etc. These are monitored at the time of supervision sessions. Medical checks seen had appointments and treatments for eyes, dental etc all completed and immunizations up to date.

In respect of staff files and records there has been some improvement of the process and record keeping to ensure the records kept of checks and references show they have been obtained and their outcomes. This has improved records and access to information both held in the human resources section and with administration systems in the fostering service.

However there were still a number of errors in respect of the information relating to foster carers held on a register / spreadsheet and a mismatch with information held on the files. This indicates no progress has been made with the administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement needs to be improved to ensure information is current and accurate. Similarly the registered manager and fostering service staff must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files.

One member of staff had been pro active in developing a register of children's placements in the form of a spreadsheet. Unfortunately if the member of staff is on leave or absent the information is not updated or accessible. There have been 187 referrals this year. The information records the following data: Date referred, SW, area, status, name, date placement starts, carer-ethnicity of carer and whether or not a variation is needed. Panel date, post placement meeting date, date placement ended. This information is used to inform management and the reviewing officer and forms the basis for management information to panel on a regular basis.

The information section at the Civic centre keeps records of the Looked After Children. This is similar information, but as with the above it does not meet the requirements of the children's of the register in the Regulations.

Walsall local authority children services are gradually improving their IT facilities and abilities however it is taking too long for programmes to be implemented that will record the required information for efficient and reliable management information. At the present time the management team are dependant upon handwritten calculations and handwritten notes which are time consuming to collate and open to human error.

There has been good progress in respect of the large number of outstanding statutory requirements relating to premises. The registered person provided an action plan to the Commission for Social Care Inspection with timescales for the relocation of the fostering services. Good progress has been made and although there has been a slight delay the redevelopment plans for the premises are well underway. In the meantime the Fostering Service Team has been relocated to town centre premises for the duration of the completion of refurbishment of the premises. The current accommodation is satisfactory, though is a considerable change for all staff with common open plan office for all team members. Facilities also includes one room with three managers, one room for storage and cabinets, a kitchen, a meeting room and an administration office. Given this is temporary accommodation the limited inspection did not identify any health and safety issues.

In addition to the progress being made with the main building the fostering service team has celebrated the opening of the town centre shop front. This provides excellent facilities as a drop in centre for potential foster carers and represents the fostering service through making links with the local community.

Shop is welcoming and warm on entering. There are staff to greet enquirers. There is a separate room behind, where private conversations could take place. However, staff are quite vulnerable and accessible to people coming into the shop, so they need to maintain at least three people at all times for safety purposes. There are security issues for the building and management

and staff are well aware of the importance of personal safety and for that of visitors to the premises.

There has been good progress made in establishing a service to Family and friend foster carers. This has been limited due to staff vacancies. However a framework for this aspect of the service is being established through the commitment of the staff team and the co-operation and support of the reviewing officer. Feedback from family and friends foster carers was very positive. The family and friend support worker has developed a sub group to check out the support and training needs of family and friend carers. A consultation day is proposed for the spring to launch this new aspect of the service and bring carers together. An attractive booklet with information relevant to family and friend foster carers has been produced and made to look friendly and carefully worded to be meaningful.

Family and friend foster carer reviews have progressed with 80% now up to date and hopefully a 100% to be completed by the end of March.2007. Work is being done to for parity in competencies, all the paperwork now in place. Skills for competence paperwork is available and there are competence reviews completed in supervision sessions. There continue to be staff vacancy issues for link worker support to Family and friend carers. However there has been a recent recruitment drive and it is hoped appointments will be made.

Those established family and friend carers had some concerns mainly about the change in approach and changing expectations of themselves and increased contact from the services. However following the first review and as they gain an understanding of the link worker role after initial hostility feedback has been more positive as family and friend carers see the benefits of support from the service. New people have a different view of their role and the relationship with the fostering service and this is very positive. " Some Friends and family have taken a real interest."

Finance and accommodation can be an issue for family and friend foster carers especially for those who may eventually want to consider mainstream foster care. However at the present time there are no resources to fund this and this is not part of the strategic planning.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.	FS25	22 Sch 2	The registered manager the administration systems holding the register of foster carers and of children in placement needs to be improved to ensure information is current and accurate. 25.6	31/03/07
2.	FS25	22	The registered manager and fostering service staff must ensure information is maintained current, accurate and held in the correct files. 25.6	31/03/07
3.	FS32	17	The responsible person must ensure that policies, procedures and practice in the fostering service address and recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friend carers. 32.1 Timescale of 30/04/05 has not been met.	30/04/07

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.	FS7	It is recommended that the placements be monitored to measure the suitability of matching in placements and where the needs of the service to make a placement are primary and any shortfall in the abilities of foster carers.
2.	FS15	The front sheet in the staff and foster carer recruitment file should also record the start and end date of the employment. 15
3.	FS15	A system to flag up the children in foster carers home when they reach their 16 th birthday and the need to complete a CRB check. 15
4.	FS18	Consideration should be given to the provision of a staff changing area. 26.4 & 18.5
5.	FS21	Review the support offered through respite provision to foster carers. 21.2
6.	FS22	Foster Care Agreements should be updated to meet the 2002 Regulations as carers are promoted to new Levels with the new expectations and responsibilities that go with that. 22.4
7.	FS30	It is recommended that the quality assurance and monitoring of the panel functions is to be developed. 30.5
8.	FS31	It is recommended that carers are provided with information regarding insurance cover provided in respect of the administration of invasive medication. 31.1 & 6.7

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