



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wigan Social Services Dept Fostering Service

**Hesketh Meadow
196 Newton Road
Lowton
Warrington
Cheshire
WA3 2AQ**

Lead Inspector
Anthony Kyem

Announced Inspection
14th November 2005 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	Wigan Social Services Dept Fostering Service
Address	Hesketh Meadow 196 Newton Road Lowton Warrington Cheshire WA3 2AQ
Telephone number	01942 487200
Fax number	01942 487211
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Wigan Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 12th November 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Wigan Social Services Department's Fostering Service provides care and accommodation through recruited foster carers to a large number of children and young people using public care. Placements with family/friend foster carers provide a valuable service to children and young people enabling them to remain within their own families or extended networks. Family network foster carers provide short term breaks for children, young people and their families who require this specialist service. The service aims to work " with flexibility to meet the diverse needs of children "...providing " training and support to foster carers to enable them to offer a competent, safe and caring service. "

SUMMARY

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

The inspection of the service was announced and took place over six days with two Inspectors undertaking this work. As part of the inspection, the manager of the fostering service, a senior social worker, three sets of recruited foster carers and some of the young people who live within these placements were spoken to. The homes of these young people and carers were visited. Information the service keeps about foster carers and young people was looked at. A large number of questionnaires were sent out to young people and their carers and their views about the service have been included within this inspection report.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is a flexible service which offers its carers good levels of support overall. The recruitment of foster carers is continuing so that better matching of placements can be achieved. The educational arrangements in place for young people were satisfactory. The way the service assesses foster carers is thorough. One carer says, " If I need any help or information I get it at a phone call. " another says, " Not only do they provide valuable support through phone calls and visits, but practical help is also available. If you need someone to take your child to contact or look after them if you have a hospital appointment, the placement support team will help out. "

What has improved since the last inspection?

Good improvements to the service have been made following last years inspection. More staff are now employed by the service. New systems are in place to make sure that carers are made aware of concerns before children and young people are placed. The service is working hard to improve consultation with carers and young people. Unannounced visits are now being introduced to foster carer's homes, in line with legislative requirements. Better administrative support is now available to the service's staff. Better support is provided to relative/friends carers. One relative/friend carer who responded using a questionnaire says, " 100 % support, friendly staff...if you have any problems with the children's behaviour the staff are brilliant. I get excellent advice and reassurance...I am very satisfied. "

What they could do better:

More foster carers are needed to meet the placement needs of older children. Despite positive improvements made to the service, more work still needs to be undertaken on consultation so that all young people and carers are able to influence the way in which the service is run. This area of the service is improving and developing.

The four questionnaires received from young people in terms of consultation, offered a mixed response with 50 % of young people feeling that they were consulted by the service. Of the seventeen questionnaires received from carers, a healthy proportion (twelve) reported consultation to be good with only four carers feeling consultation to be poor. One carer said that they felt consulted about important decisions " sometimes " .

The fostering service should ensure that it gets involved with the process of assessment of family friends carers sooner, in identifying concerns early, offering these carers support and advice where needed. Overall the vast majority of carers said they felt they were adequately informed about the backgrounds of children placed with them. Two carers believed more information on health should be provided. Negative comments included things like, " you only get to know bits. I think yes, we should have more information to protect you and your family." Another carer says, " Sometimes they think we wont take children if they tell us, but we would know what to expect and be prepared if we knew. "

One foster carer felt that the time it took them from completing an application to becoming approved was too long, 18 months in this case. The service could plan ahead for future staffing implications as a result of positive recruitment drives.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes for 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 the following standard(s):

12

The arrangements in place for promoting young people's health are good. Young people are registered with all relevant healthcare services to ensure that their health needs are met.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service makes it clear to foster carers the expectations placed upon them to meet young people's health needs comprehensively. Healthy eating and lifestyle was encouraged and promoted by those carers whose homes were visited. Young people views on health were positive with comments like, " Given advice on sexual health, encouraged to eat healthy and stay clean...I have good balanced meals everyday...getting help going to the doctors and going to the dentist and hospital if I need to. There's help if I need it...my carers do their best to help me but I don't need help because I'm a pretty healthy person. "

Information on the health needs of looked after children is made available to carers. Carers visited felt they were given enough information on health for the children and young people placed with them. Those young people's files examined contained evidence that annual medical assessments are being undertaken and healthcare plans completed.

The supervisory visits undertaken by the fostering service staff, ensure that young people have their health needs routinely monitored. Statutory review meetings further provide formal assurance that young people's health needs are being looked at. Carers record all medical appointment attended by young people within their diaries. One carer says, " Its good to give these dates for reviews."

There are no children or young people placed by the service who are not registered with relevant healthcare services. The manager of the fostering service is currently exploring a healthy foster carers home scheme to further promote the health needs of young people in public care, with the intention of providing specific information and training to carers on relevant health related matters.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

The fostering service is well managed and run. Foster carers offer accommodation, which meets young people's needs for comfortable, homely accommodation. Careful thought and consideration is given when placing young people so that positive outcomes are achieved. The fostering panel is well organised and ensures panel members are able to identify concerns, scrutinise practice and contribute towards better outcomes for children and young people placed by the service.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the fostering service was interviewed during this inspection and provided lots of useful information about new developments within the service. The manager herself is suitably experienced and manages this service efficiently. Systems are in place to ensure that enhanced CRB disclosures for all carers and staff are undertaken every three years.

Those foster carers homes visited by the Inspectors provided young people with accommodation and care to good standards. Those placements visited were observed to provide comfortable accommodation, which met young people's needs. One placement visited had two young people placed who had lived within the placement for 5 and 6 years respectively, offering both young

people placement stability. Both young people were found to have thrived within this placement.

Safe care practices are followed and adhered to and foster carers are made aware of their responsibilities under health and safety. Annual safety checks are undertaken by the service. One carer's file inspected contained information, which highlighted a potential concern. There was no supportive evidence on file to indicate that the concern had been appropriately explored before the placement was made. There was also a lengthy delay in the service initiating contact in monitoring this placement and completing the post approval assessment. (See Standard 32 of this report).

The numbers of recruited foster carers is increasing, with the service campaigning hard to recruit more carers to enable a greater choice of placements. Every effort is made to place children and young people in appropriate placements. Evidence of the service placing siblings together was observed. The service is developing in the recruitment of carers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Placements decisions pay positive regard to the cultural, racial and religious needs of children and young people from minority groups.

Foster carers receive training and written guidance on child protection. Those foster carers spoken to communicated a good level of understanding of safe care practices. Pre approval training covers the services safe care policy. Written evidence was provided by the service to evidence that child protection matters and concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. The number, nature and outcomes of all allegations were recorded and made available to the commission. The service's recruitment and selection procedures for appointing new staff follow good practice guidance in safeguarding children. Staff files were not examined this year as these have been examined for three consecutive years. All appropriate checks are undertaken by the service to ensure that all employed are suitable to work with children and young people. Carer's files inspected each contained an enhanced CRB disclosure. These forms can now be destroyed and a copy of the identification code recorded on each carer's file.

On the first day of the inspection the fostering panel was observed. The chair enabled all participants to contribute fully where relevant issues were explored. The panel provides a good quality assurance function in monitoring and reviewing the work of the assessors. One example was observed where the panel members identified a possible concern to do with sanctions. This matter was explored and clarity sought. A good practice decision was made to ascertain the reasons for a carer's resignation when this was brought to panel. The panel does have as required, independent members from education and health.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s): 7, 13, 31

The fostering service values diversity and actively promotes equality, however, a challenge for the service is to recruit more carers from black and ethnic minority groups to ensure that young people have a greater choice of placements to meet their cultural needs better. The arrangements in place for promoting education are good and afford positive outcomes for children and young people placed by the service.

EVIDENCE:

Although applications from minority groups are encouraged, a challenge for the service is to recruit more carers from black and ethnic minority (BEM) groups, in addition to the recruitment of carers specifically for teenagers. The service continues to experience some difficulties with this. Out of borough placements are considered where internal provisions limit choice. There are separate procedures in place to meet the needs of young people placed from BEM backgrounds. This area of the service is however developing.

The service also provides short-term breaks for a small number of children and young people with complex needs. Specialist equipment e.g. portable ramps, bathing aids and hoists are all provided by the service. Family network carers are recruited in the same way as with other recruited foster carers but are supervised and supported by a separate team.

Family network carers receive training specific to the needs of the children and young people. Parents remain central to the promotion of their own child's health and education. The disruption rate amongst these placements is low. A

review of the family network service is currently being undertaken by the service.

The service does well to promote the educational needs of children and young people placed in public care. All of the young people looked after receive education. One young person visited is soon to attend university, which is commendable and an excellent achievement. Comments received from young people included comments like " Encouraged to do college work and to attend college on a regular basis...There's help if I need it. "

Personal Education Plans were in place on those young people's case files inspected. Supervisory visits have been reviewed to include more emphasis on education and health. Those foster carers homes visited were supportive of young people's educational needs. The service has a lead worker in education who is responsible for the educational opportunities available to children and young people in public care. The service celebrates young people's educational achievements and foster carers contributions towards young people who achieve.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10, 11

Contact is promoted in ensuring that young people are able to maintain their relationships with their families. Consultation has developed and improved so that young people and carers are better enabled to influence the services they receive.

EVIDENCE:

The service has a designated team of support workers who specifically facilitate and supervise contact. In addition foster carers are encouraged to facilitate contact wherever possible and those carers visited demonstrated an understanding on why some visits have to be supervised. Social work assistants and social workers also support and facilitate contact. In all, contact is a planned, structured and shared responsibility.

Foster carers spoken to were able to share their examples of how contact was promoted, in some cases contact had taken place within the foster carers` own homes. Comments received from foster carers included comments like, " Take them to contact, keep in touch with parents where applicable, where possible work with parents...we encourage regular telephone contact between visits...X`s grandparents have been for Sunday lunch. "

Of the seventeen questionnaires received from carers, a healthy proportion of twelve, reported consultation to be good, with only four carers feeling consultation to be poor. One carer said that they felt consulted about important decisions sometimes. The service has undertaken a number of

consultation exercises with both carers and young people. A consultation strategy has been produced and Barnardos have undertaken this work on the services behalf with two consultation events being held for young people to attend. Comments the commission received from young people included, " There should be more activities and days out for us...The social services should get in touch more often...with two of the best carers ever...After care worker promises me group meetings once a month and since July I have had one."

Evidence was observed during panel to indicate that some workers are consulting with young people as part of foster carers annual reviews. The manager of the service says, " This can be a bit hit and miss. " The panel chair read out a letter from one young person to panel members, which was expressive of the young person feeling well, looked after.

A senior family placement worker has also undertaken a consultation exercise with family friends carers and says, " I think we are developing a much better service...we're slowly building up relationships with these people...Its been about getting out there and offering yourself...making sure phone calls (to family/friends) are regular. "

The findings following the above consultation are now being positively considered by the service. Consultation with carers and young people has improved and the service should continue to develop this.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

14, 29

Foster carers are working together with the service to ensure that young people are able to make the transition towards adulthood successfully. Foster carers receive prompt payments and allowances.

EVIDENCE:

During an interview held with the manager of the service, questions were put to the manager in relation to how the service responds to the needs of young people working towards independence. Joint visits have been undertaken by the fostering service with the aftercare team to placements where young people are age 17 years and over. A supported lodgings scheme has been introduced, where payments are made to carers equivalent to the fostering allowance. Young people have greater control over their own finances with this arrangement.

Pathway Plans are completed by the aftercare team and carers visited, confirmed that they had received completed plans in most cases. One young person visited was waiting for an aftercare worker to be appointed, so was therefore without a Pathway Plan. The aftercare team has held events to support foster carers with the task of dealing with young people's independence, training and employment. Foster carers spoken to understand the importance of meeting the objectives of the Pathway Plan in achieving successful outcomes for young people's preparation for adulthood/independence. One carer visited was not consulted by the aftercare team about the development of a young person's Pathway Plan and was not informed that the young person had been allocated a worker. The young person was unhappy about meetings being cancelled and that her Pathway

Plan made reference to another young person she had never heard of. The young person also felt that the support provided by the aftercare team could be improved. It is recommended that the service look into these issues further with the carer and the young person.

None of the foster carers spoken to suggested there were any difficulties with them receiving their payments or allowances. Carers confirmed prompt payment and having access to the departmental allowances for foster carers. Family and friends carers are financially supported with maintenance payments equivalent to the basic fostering allowance although these payments are substantially lower than the allowances payable to recruited foster carers who receive additional payments, which cover young people's clothing, personal spending and leisure needs.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17, 21, 24, 32

The fostering service's staff are suitably qualified and experienced and offer foster carers good levels of support overall. Family and friends carers are receiving better services and support as a result of increased resources. Case records for carers and young people are maintained to satisfactory standards.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is now fully staffed for the first time in three years. Three additional posts have been created to enable the service to meet its own aims and objectives better. A dedicated team of four workers consisting of a social worker, senior social worker and two support workers has been developed to provide additional support to family/friends carers. The Placement Support Team also supports carers by providing daily support, which includes some out of hours, evening and weekend working. Foster carers can also contact the Emergency Duty Team for out of hours support.

The service has clear procedures in place for the recruitment of its foster carers which the manager for the service feels works well saying, " generally speaking advertising works very well...recruitments going very well." A senior social worker of the team has the responsibility of preparing a recruitment strategy each year for the service. In the last year recruitment has gone well, with the numbers of carers available to the service increasing. During November 2004- 2005 the service approved 33 carers of which, 20 were family/friends carers, 10 were recruited foster carers and 3 were short breaks carers. In comparison to the previous year for the same period, where 23 carers were approved of which, 12 were family/friends carers, 10 were recruited foster carers and 1 was a carer for short breaks. The most significant increase being amongst family/friends carers.

Family/friend carers are assessed and approved within six weeks, even if this means they are only approved as an interim measure pending the completion of a further assessment. One of three family friends carers files looked at, showed that there was a considerable delay in the service taking forward the next stage of the assessment. A senior social worker felt this was an isolated case and explained the circumstances. A concern identified on a carers file was also clarified about the suitability of the carer. This issue however needs to be formally recorded.

The service has a detailed training plan in place for foster carers. Newly approved carers are now automatically nominated for four training courses within their first and second years following approval. Foster carers are being trained to NVQ standards supported with this by NVQ assessors now in post. Training is monitored by panel and through carers' supervision.

Family/friends now receive monthly supervisory phone calls and three monthly visits are being introduced. Induction training for family/friends carers is being developed and will be introduced in January 2006. A post approval pack for family/friends carers has been devised and distributed to all carers. The post approval pack contains information for carers about residence orders. However there appears to be some unease and distrust amongst some carers about

residence orders. It is therefore suggested that family/friends carers are provided with further information and advice about residence orders and finances.

Inspection of carers` and young people`s files showed that records are being maintained to satisfactory standards. Written records inspected demonstrate that carers receive monthly supervision and support. Carers both Inspectors spoke with, confirm this.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	2
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	2
29	3

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

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	9	38 & 35	The service must ensure that there is minimum delay in the completion of the post approval assessment and ensure that the service fulfils its obligations to supervise emergency placements. Written case records kept must evidence that relevant checks have been undertaken.	01/01/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	7	The service should continue to recruit carers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and carers specifically for teenagers.
2	11	The service should continue to develop upon the consultations being held with carers and young people so that they are able to influence the way in which the service is run.
3	14	The service should ensure that all young people have allocated aftercare workers in place and have Pathway

		Plans completed in consultation with young people and their carers.
4	32	Information and advice on residence orders should be made available to family friends carers in writing, through supervisory visits and training.

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