



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd

**8 London Road
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME10 1NA**

Lead Inspector
Lucy
Ansell

Announced
20 July 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
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Reader Information

Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk 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 The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd

Address 8 London Road
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Kent
ME10 1NA

Telephone number 01795-470222

Fax number 01795-436181

Email address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) The Xcel Partnership Ltd

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Diane Gay

Type of registration Fostering Agency

No. of places registered (if applicable) N/A

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places Fostering Agency

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 8 November 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Xcel 2000 is an Independent Fostering Agency as defined by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. There are currently thirty six foster carers approved by the agency. At the time of the inspection forty-two placements had been made. The agency offers foster placements for assessment, support, respite and rehabilitation guided by individual children's and young peoples ongoing care plan. As appropriate placements can be made for the short, medium and long term and if required on an emergency basis. Foster carers benefit from clear systems of support including an allocated supervising social / support worker. There is a facility for day care provision for children who are not attending full time education. This provision is very much a stopgap intervention pending suitable educational arrangements being made in conjunction with the placing local authority and the local education authority / private tutoring organisations. Child centred therapy can be arranged if required. The office premises are close to Sittingbourne town centre and can provide a suitable venue for training, meetings and contact visits – supervised or otherwise. The agency has foster carers based in Kent, Medway and South London.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection commenced on the 18th July 2005 and was conducted over a five - day period. Time was spent interviewing agency staff, reading policies and procedures and scrutinising other relevant documentation and records. Carers were randomly selected, in order that their files and those of the children / young people placed with them could be inspected. The inspector also conducted home visits.

Other sources of evidence included the observation of a Panel meeting, a training session and perusal of documentation received by the Commission, including the Manager's Self – Assessment, Pre – Inspection Questionnaire and questionnaires from children / young people, carers and placing authorities. All of the evidence supported that an experienced management team runs the agency well. Carers are carefully recruited and well – supported, through regular visits and ongoing relevant training.

Throughout the inspection process the social work, administrative and management team were welcoming, open and receptive to the inspection process.

Four foster homes were visited and the many foster carers spoken to who took part in the inspection are thanked for the valuable contribution that they made.

Sixteen children, fourteen foster carers and six placing social workers completed pre inspection questionnaires. The outcome of these on the whole was very positive and expressed that a very good service is being provided and the children are satisfied with the care given.

What the service does well:

The agency retains and recruits excellent carers from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds. Hence, children and young people are placed appropriately and sympathetically, according to their presenting needs with good matching processes in place. Consultation processes ensure that children, young people, carers and placing authorities have the opportunity to express views and opinions about the running and continuing development of the agency. Carers feel they have excellent support and are visited regularly and receive ongoing training and guidance. They unanimously agreed the out of hour's system and being able to always contact a supervisor or directors was excellent. It was also felt because it was still a small agency there was always a friendly voice to reassure and who knew you and your young person. Policies and procedures are regularly updated and the monitoring procedures are efficient, ensure systems are working correctly.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The manager of the agency has now completed her NVQ level 4 in management and has been through the fit persons interview for the Commission for Social Care Inspection and was approved. The agency now ensures the staff register contains all relevant information and the regulation 42 reports have been improved. The pro-forma for the matching process is constantly being improved upon and this is reflected in the high standard of matching being achieved. The safe caring policies for all foster carers have also been updated and more training supplied.

What they could do better:

There is only one area needing improvement and the agency is currently reviewing this, so documentation in respect of maintaining detailed and accurate health care notes will be developed about the children placed with its Carers.

The agency should plan to include as a matter of good practice an independent member of the panel who has an awareness of different cultural and ethnic needs. The agency has addressed this and has a suitable person in mind for when a vacancy occurs. Other good practice recommendations made include CRB's to be filed separately, staff to sign they have read and understood policies, audit of contents kept on staff files and to include a promotion of good health in the children's guide.

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

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12

The children placed by the agency benefit from having foster carers who positively promote their the health and development though the agency needs to improve some of its documentation in this area.

EVIDENCE:

Individual children's files were inspected and carers were interviewed. Evidence was seen children were registered with health care services and were being supported to attend appointments. In some cases, carers held more information than was on file at the agency. It was noted that foster carers were completing the medication books that the agency supplied in many different formats. A good practice recommendation is made to produce a policy on handling and writing up of medications. Some carers were also unsure of procedures relating to consent for first aid or any required emergency treatment. A good practice recommendation is made for a separate sheet detailing consent and the procedures to be made available to carers.

Carers receive training and guidance in respect of maintaining optimum health and Foster Carer Agreements make this requirement clear. On the foster carers monthly reports are health concerns and appointments recorded. Appropriate referrals are made to external agencies where specific health concerns are raised. The agency is currently reviewing its documentation in respect of maintaining detailed and accurate health care notes in respect of the children placed with its carers to enable these records to move with the child.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

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

The work of the agency is promoted by persons running and managing it who are suitably well qualified and experienced.

Children are protected by the agency's robust processes used with regard to the recruitment of staff and carers.

The needs of children are well matched to the experience and skills of foster carers.

The monitoring systems in respect of protecting against abuse and neglect are robust and protect children from harm.

The Panel works to clear and effective protocols which ensures that all carers appointed to work for the agency have been properly assessed and vetted.

EVIDENCE:

Personnel records of agency staff were randomly selected and scrutinised. Records were of a very good standard. In the personnel records, evidence of relevant professional qualifications was seen and CRB certificates were in place. A good practice recommendation is made to seek advice from the CRB as to how these should be kept. Written references are followed up by telephone enquiries and Enhanced CRB's are obtained and renewed. The

agency has a system in place to ensure checks are renewed three yearly. A good practice recommendation would be to have an audit sheet of contents of staff files to ensure consistency of practice. In interviews with staff it was evident that robust recruitment procedures were in place and the agency was safeguarding the children and young people.

Form F's had been completed to a good standard and the agency continues to monitor the quality of these assessments against its own criteria. Although most placements are overall emergencies written evidence was seen in all of the children's files to demonstrate that matching considerations had been made prior to a placement being secured. The written evidence regarding 'matching' showed examples of very good practice, Particularly the pro-forma used and speaking to the social workers of young people already placed there.

Carers were visited in their own homes and all were clean, well – maintained and free from obvious hazards. Detailed health and safety checks are conducted during the initial assessment and annually thereafter. A clear health and safety policy is in place and carers are provided with ongoing training.

Evidence was found to demonstrate that allegations of neglect and / or abuse are investigated by the agency, systems whereby this information is collated and regularly scrutinised are held in a file by the agency. There are also clear procedures on absconding with whom to notify and what action to take. In the foster carers handbook is policies on bullying and training is given on the vulnerability of looked after children.

The Panel that was observed scrutinised and questioned the information presented to them for the three annual reviews. The practice manager stated that all reviews are seen by panel, not just the first review as required by the standards. The panel was in agreement for all three reviews and recommendation was made to continue with approval of terms of placement. The panel members spoke with warmth and caring about the foster carers and discussions were always around how best to support and enable the carers.

Records of previous Panel meetings indicated that the group has been quorum and the members within this group come from a wide range of relevant backgrounds. All Panel members have been subject to CRB clearance and are on the staff register; there is a clear procedure in place to cover decision – making, when all members are not in agreement. The Panel has access to medical expertise and has just invited the LAC nurse to join the panel. The agency would benefit and should plan to include as a matter of good practice an independent member of the panel who has an awareness of different cultural and ethnic needs, when there is next a vacancy.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7,13 31 is N/A

The agency clearly values diversity among its carers and children and actively promotes educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The agency continues to retain and recruit carers from a very wide range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This results in children and young people being placed in culturally sensitive and appropriate placements. Carers were visited and it was evident that care was taken during the matching process of those children placed with them. Young people spoken with confirmed the importance of this aspect. The agency provides training for carers, which covers diversity, equal opportunity and dealing with discrimination.

There is clear guidance within the Foster Carer Agreement, detailing the responsibility of carers to promote and support educational achievement and the agency supports them with this by having a Children's Services Co-ordinator (CSC). She was able to demonstrate the lengths they had gone to in finding appropriate school / college placements for those in their care. In the first week of the placement the CSC will visit to introduce herself and give them a welcome pack, they are then invited to the agency to look around and meet the staff who run the day care provision for children who are out/ waiting for school. The Day Centre provides a structured day with basic maths and English provided and leisure activities. Since qualified teaching staff do not run the centre it is not classified as a centre providing formal education. The programmes offered are aimed to offer the young people opportunities of

experiencing structured situations that are similar to the school day so as to enable a smoother transition for the young people when they return to school. Young people commented very positively about this aspect through direct interviews and written questionnaires and liked having something to do during the day.

School uniform grants are provided by the agency, in order that those attending mainstream placements can immediately purchase the required clothing.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10,11

Children benefit from the agency's good policy and procedures with regard to contact arrangements. Consultation with children, young people and other parties is actively promoted to ensure that the agency is informed of and will act upon then outcomes of such consultations.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has clear and specific written agreements with placing authorities, for the instances when it is requested to support individual contact arrangements. The agency has rooms, which can be used for contact visits, which are furnished and equipped appropriately.

Individual carers frequently support contact arrangements, either at the office, in their own homes or at other venues, as agreed with the placing authority. Details of carer's responsibilities are clearly recorded. Outcomes and observations made during contact visits are written up and passed to the child / young person's responsible social worker.

The carers interviewed stated that agency staff provide them with very positive support with contact arrangements, which can be a difficult / sensitive role. Written records evidenced that the agency implements clear consultation processes. Placing agencies are always asked for feedback, following the ending of a placement and evidence was seen to support that all Social Services Teams using the agency had been written to, asking for feedback.

Carers and young people are asked for written views, prior to review meetings and the Agency also sends out periodic questionnaires to carers and children, in an attempt to obtain their views about the service. Children and young people spoken to confirmed that agency staff routinely speak with them privately, during carer support visits.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14,29

Young people are effectively supported by their carers to prepare them for adult living. Carers regularly receive their agreed payments and expenses on time.

EVIDENCE:

Clear written requirements are in place for carers assisting young people preparing for adult living. Those young people spoken with, described the level and type of support they were receiving from carers and this included budgeting, self help domestic skills and securing work / college placements.

Evidence of Local Authority 'Pathway Plans' was seen on files and carers spoke positively in almost every case about the young person's own placing authority, in terms of consulting the young person and the carer in developing and implementing these. Written policies and requirements were clear and the agency provides specific training for carers who are accommodating young people approaching adulthood.

Information about allowances and expenses was clear and explicit. Such fees are reviewed annually. No adverse comments were received from carers about payments. They are made on time and are accurate.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 2,4,19,20-25

The children and carers are supported and protected by good management systems and effective managers who are effective and efficient in all areas and ensures that the agency is appropriately staffed.

The care of children and support offered to carers is promoted by the agency ensuring that staff are appropriately qualified and receive regular on-going training. Cares benefit from receiving frequent support visits and clear written

guidance. Young people and carers can be confident that their case and administrative records are comprehensive and maintained as required.

EVIDENCE:

Senior managers within the organisation were interviewed. Each possessed the qualifications and experience needed to effectively run the agency. Lines of communication, accountability and responsibility were clear and monitoring and quality assurance systems were robust and effective.

The directors of the agency carry out 'Quality Assurance' visits with two a year. They also hold monthly meetings to keep the foster carers aware of any new developments.

All agency staff are appropriately qualified and receive regular supervision from the social workers manager fortnightly. Annual appraisals also take place. Such records were inspected and demonstrate the need to further explore and provide post - qualifying training for individuals.

There is a clear written strategy in place for working with carers. Placing officers, through their returned questionnaires, reported good communication with the agency and carers and written evidence supported that all carers receive regular, recorded supervision from their agency social worker. 'Out of Hours' support was described as "excellent". All carers had up to date written Foster Carer Agreements in place and were conversant with the agency's complaint's procedure.

All carers confirmed that they had received an unannounced visit from the agency last year and evidence was seen to confirm this. Case records for children were inspected, and contained most of the information required and in those files seen, insufficient 'health' information was found. This element is already being addressed by the agency by way of introducing a separate book, which will record all 'health related' information, in respect of the individual child.

It was also noted that the written records of the support visits to carers were kept in a secure place as contained some confidential information. These records showed that the needs / progress of the child in placement had been discussed and action plans made. The recordings for respite when more than one child is in placement, are all written up in the same book, this resulted in information on other children being held in the same place and could compromise confidentiality. This practice needs to be looked at to ensure information is kept securely.

Administrative records were inspected and found to be in good order, generally. Evidence was seen of a separate file containing information about a complaint made to the Agency and how this had been investigated and concluded. This was due to the alleged practice of the agency, this was not upheld.

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	2

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
31	N/A

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	3
29	3

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

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.	FS12	17(3a)	The carer is provided with a written health record for each child placed in their care and updated during placement and moves with the child.	31 October 2005

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.	FS12	A good practice recommendation is made to produce a policy on handling and writing up of medications.
2.	FS12	A good practice recommendation is made for treatment and first aid procedures to be made re-available to carers.
3.	FS15	A good practice recommendation would be to have an audit sheet of contents of staff files to ensure consistency of practice.
4.	FS3	A good practice recommendation is made to seek advice from the CRB as to how these should be kept on file.
5.	FS24	A good practice recommendation is made to ensure recordings for each child on respite are made secure to ensure confidentiality.
6.	FS25	A good practice recommendation is made FOR STAFF TO

		SIGN THEY HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE STAFF POLICIES.
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