



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Quality Foster Care Limited

**305 High Road
Benfleet
Essex
SS7 5HA**

Lead Inspector
Patricia Stanton

Announced Inspection
16th-23rd October 2006 11:00

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	Quality Foster Care Limited
Address	305 High Road Benfleet Essex SS7 5HA
Telephone number	01268 795597
Fax number	01268 754333
Email address	admin@qualityfostercare.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Quality Foster Care Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jennifer Kim Paterson
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The Registered Manager should complete a course equivalent to NVQ Level 4 in childcare management by 2007.

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Quality Foster Care is an independent fostering agency in Benfleet, Essex situated in the main high street close to local transport, shops and amenities. The agency is based in a two-story building and comprises of a shop, kitchen diner, training room/kitchenette, two offices, contact room, training area and a bathroom/toilet.

At the rear of the premises has parking for staff and a large public car park. The premises is decorated and furnished to a good standard with facilities in the agency for children to play.

SUMMARY

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

Quality Foster Care agency was inspected from 16/10/06 – 24/10/06.

As part of the inspection process, questionnaires were sent to all foster carers, foster children, child protection teams and all placing social workers.

Responses were received from six young people, seven foster carers and two social workers, details of which, are included in the report.

Responses from children were very complimentary of care they received and foster carers were particularly positive of the support received from the agency.

The inspector spoke to two foster children and one baby, seven foster carers, one social worker, the registered manager/administration manager and the senior administrations assistant/company secretary.

Responses from foster children evidenced they were happy, healthy and safe. The inspector attended a carers coffee morning on the 20th September 2006, as part of the inspection process, but was unable to attend a panel meeting. However, the inspector had attended a panel meeting within the last twelve months. Panel members remained the same with only one change due to retirement. The inspector examined three panel-meeting minutes.

It is the conclusion of the inspector that Quality Foster Care Limited is an excellent service and meets the five outcomes for foster children in respect of Every Child Matters –

Being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a contribution and achieving economic wellbeing.

The registered manager had prepared the foster children and carers for inspection, making the inspection open and inclusive.

The inspector would like to thank the foster children, carers, agency staff and the registered manager for their hospitality, assistance and contributions during inspection.

What the service does well:

All children seen during inspection appeared happy with their foster carers and communication between carers and children was mutually positive and respectful.

The agency provides experienced, caring foster carers and link workers to support carers and children twenty-four hours a day.

The agency carefully matches children to carers and promote children's cultural needs.

The agency supplies sessional workers to assist carers to provide an outreach service for children and their families.

The agency arranges excellent therapeutic support to children who require it.

Assessments are thorough and robust and carer recruitment helps protect children.

The agency has an efficient and professional foster panel.

The agency ensures care for children reflect decisions made by placing local authorities and care plans reflect children's changing needs.

Care plans are clear and contain all relevant information.

Staff supervision is good.

Family contact and education is promoted by the agency and transport provided if required.

All foster carers spoken to were positive about the agency and carers stated they were treated as part of a team in a caring professional way.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has recruited an excellent registered manager who has progressed the service since the last inspection improving outcomes for carers and foster children including:

Providing excellent training for carers, enabling them to meet the needs of foster children in their care.

Improving care plans and office administration, making files and tracking care more efficient.

Seeking the views and opinion of carers, children and social workers as part of a quality assurance survey.

Introducing guidance for carers on record keeping and the Internet with relevant up to date information regarding fostering.

Foster carers are encouraged to keep records of children's school achievements and reports.

Foster children now have saving accounts in their own names.

What they could do better:

Ensure all incident logs include relevant information, which are numbered and signed by staff completing them.

Ensure social workers complete appropriate risk assessments for young people who could potentially harm others when unsupervised and provide carers with the appropriate guidelines.

The agency should employ an additional social worker to help support the registered manager.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are supported to help each child in care, to receive health care, which meets her/his needs in respect of physical, emotional and social needs.

The agency provides carers and children with information to enable children and young people to make an informed choice, about appropriate health needs. Quality in this outcome area is good.

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

EVIDENCE:

All foster children seen, appeared happy and healthy. Sampled files evidenced children are registered with local doctors and attend regular health care appointments including hospital, consultant, doctor, optician, dentist and therapist.

The agency seeks therapy sessions for children and young people plus training for carers in emotional conditions, to help them understand children's needs. One young person and his carer had received excellent therapeutic input from a counselling service arranged by the local authority, enabling the young person to move on. The registered provider had also arranged training for the carers from fostering network, which the carers found very informative.

Other training organised for carers included:

Attachment, sexual health, valuing diversity/bringing up children in a multi-Cultural Society, parent line plus, play therapy, child protection, NSPCC part 1, sex exploitation, and de-escalation techniques.

Children spoken to stated they received a healthy diet from carers who gave them good advice about staying healthy.

The agency gives carers' guidelines regarding health and safety in the home and all carers now receive up to date information regarding changes in fostering services including safer care guide and the green paper.

At a carers meeting the registered manager was seen to give foster carers good information, advice and literature regarding changes in fostering and offered training, which affect care, keeping them updated on recent legislation. One carer stated "Interesting and relevant information is copied and supplied to us. We admire their professionalism and thoroughness".

Both carers and agency social workers act as advocates for foster children and ensure they attend appointments.

One social worker responded to young peoples health outcomes "The carer has done everything in the area appropriately".

Foster carers keep records of children's health for future planning and sampled care plans confirmed children had appropriate up to date immunisation and health appointment records, including statutory medicals.

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):

3,6,8,9,15,30.

Quality in this outcome is excellent.

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

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation and has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

The Fostering panel has a clear written policy, which is implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

The fostering service recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Staff working at the agency are suitable to work with children and young people to ensure they are safeguarded.

The service ensures that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer.

EVIDENCE:

All agency staff and foster carers' have completed child protection training. Carers confirmed they had attended child protection training recently updating their skills and the agency had a policy and procedure for staff and carers regarding handling and reporting any incidents of abuse.

Two foster carers were working towards NVQ level 3 in care for children and young people and three other carers come from a background in nursing, teaching, social and youth work.

The agency had made one referral of abuse since the last inspection and alerted the appropriate professionals plus CSCI.

All procedures were completed within appropriate timescales and outcomes recorded.

Young people are given a guide from the agency giving details of how to complain and where they can seek help. Young people have the opportunity to speak to the agency social workers. One young person spoken to stated he knew how to make a complaint and if he had a problem with the agency, he would notify his foster carers or social worker.

The agency make's regular visits to the foster carers home, including unannounced visits to ensure young people are safe.

Foster children appeared to have a very good relationship with the agency social workers that make themselves available 24 hours a day for support. One young person stated he was able to speak to the link agency social worker that visits him regularly at home. The young person stated, "She asks if I would like to speak to her, in private in my room".

Records confirmed one complaint had been made about the agency since the last inspection, which was handled effectively and in appropriate timescales by the registered manager.

Minutes from the fostering panel confirmed the panel is comprised of appropriate numbers of professional and independent persons, which assess foster carers. Records confirmed panel discussion and selection was robust covering all aspect of the carer's suitability in an objective and professional non-discriminatory manner. Minutes confirmed the agency address all issues and changes to personal circumstances.

Comments from carers included "The panel allowed us time to address questions in a professional but friendly way, encouraging us to give clarity without intimidation"

The agency has an appropriate number of carers to meet the needs of children and prides themselves with good matching, to ensure the children's' cultural and ethnic backgrounds are met. This was evidenced in examined files.

One young person who could not speak English had been matched very well to a carer who had herself arrived in the United Kingdom many years ago, unable to speak English.

One carer stated "They always look for the right placement to match our family and always get it right. We hope to be part of the team for years to come".

Placements at the agency appeared very stable and children attached to their carers.

Young people wrote, "I feel well cared for"; "Yeah they treat me like one of their own".

Care plans evidenced foster children were treated like part of the family, included in annual holidays and daily activities with the family.

One young person stated he was happy to be being taken abroad for a holiday with his carers for a month".

Foster carers appeared committed and very caring of the children in their care.

Staff recruitment is robust and the agency carry out all appropriate checks and verify candidates references.

Files contained appropriate number of references, application forms, identification and contracts of employment.

However, sessional workers files did not contain records of previous employment dates recorded and therefore gaps in employment not verified.

This was discussed with the registered manager who was to request the information from sessional staff.

One agency staff member confirmed she was able to voice her views and opinions to management and found management very approachable.

The staff member stated "I feel very happy working here, as I feel I am consulted on everything, receiving excellent support from the registered manager.

I have attended all carers training and enjoyed an excellent attachment training session. I receive monthly supervision and have daily unofficial supervision with the registered manager who is excellent."

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.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people and their families are provided with foster carer services which value diversity and promote equality.

Foster carers promote educational achievement.

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this agency.

EVIDENCE:

One foster child had been allocated an interpreter and was supported by the carer and the agencies social worker to collate a list of 800 words and phrases in the young persons own language to help him communicate with others. The carer had made flash cards with pictures and had started to learn the young persons language to enhance communication with the young person. The carer supported the young persons cultural differences in respect of his daily routine including Ramadan, language, special diet and religious prays. The young person was abiding by the rules of fasting during Ramadan and the carer sought cable television in Dali to support the young person with his cultural needs.

Carers receive guidance regarding equal opportunities, HIV, AIDS and training in diversity and different cultural needs.

The registered manager appeared to have taken great care to ensure that equal opportunities are in place and appeared aware of growing multicultural society. This is reflected in the agencies updated policies, procedure and training for carers.

Files confirmed foster carers encourage children to attend activities and interests to suit their individual needs and offer them the opportunity to attend religious services if requested. One young person confirmed he was encouraged to join a football club.

The agency offers guidelines to carers regarding foster children's educational needs and examined files confirmed carers were proactive in helping foster children with education, homework and helping them achieve. One carer stated she helped her foster child with homework and the agency were to offer extra english lessons at home for the child. Examined care plans contained school reports and personal education plan.

The agency has a high level of foster children in full time education and offers support with transport when required. Examined files confirmed young people were encouraged to attend further education, enrol in work experience and take up part time work as part of becoming independent. Young people were able to achieve and grow in self-confidence. One carer was to give driving lessons to her foster child for a birthday present.

One carer stated, "The agency helped our foster child get back into school". Files confirmed the agency and foster carers attend young peoples' school meetings and events.

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):

10,11.

The agency makes sure that each child or young person is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as part of the care plan agreement ensuring children's opinions, and those of their families and other significant to the child, are sought over all issues, which are likely to affect their daily life and future.

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this agency.

EVIDENCE:

Care plans examined confirmed foster children maintain contact with their birth families, siblings and develop friendships outside the foster home.

Family contact is encouraged by the agency as agreed by the placing authority and agency staff and carers support supervised contact in the chosen location including the agency offices. Transport and supervision is provided for contact sessions by the agency.

One young person visited confirmed he was able to stay at his friends' house at the weekend and had regular contact with his father, which he hoped would increase. It was noted although the young person had a risk assessment on file from the local authority there were no assessment and guidelines for the carer regarding overnight, unsupervised contact at the friends home.

The inspector tried to contact the placing social worker during inspection to enquire why an assessment had not been completed.

The placing social worker stated an assessment had been completed by her, details of which were in the local authority plan, however, a copy of the plans was not on file at the agency.

The issue was discussed with the registered manager at inspection, who was to seek written confirmation of the assessment and meet with the social worker to discuss plans to form appropriate guidelines for the carers to ensure the safe guarding of children.

Another young person visited was seen to go out to meet his friends in the town and was allowed to have friends back to the house.

Carers, children and their families are invited to reviews and young people at inspection stated they were invited to give their views and opinions regarding care.

The agency had complied an annual survey to seek the views and opinions of children, carers, their family and the placing social workers to help monitor and improve the service.

Comments from social workers included:

"They do well working with the criteria of the care plan working closely with other agencies". "They are very child focused". "I am pleased with the communication at Quality Foster Care and the ability to offer appropriate assistance within timescales required".

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):

14,29.

The fostering agency ensures foster carers help young people develop skills, competence and knowledge for adult living.

Carers receive an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover their cost of caring for each child or young person placed with them.

Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Quality in this outcome is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this agency.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service prepares young people for independent living but some care plans did not contain appropriate local authority pathway plans. Carers are encouraged to record young person independent skills.

The agency is good at sending reports to the local authority but one placing social worker sated "It would be good if the agency sent monthly reports from carers so information is passed on in time".

Foster carers confirmed they received their allowance regularly and on time. The agency review fees annually.

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):

1,2,4,5,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,27,32.

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.
The people involved in carrying and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills, with expertise to manage the work effectively and efficiently with experience of childcare and fostering.
The service is monitored and controlled well.
Staff and carers training is excellent.
The agency has a clear strategy for working and supporting carers.
Carers are provided with excellent supervision and support from the agency.
There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.
All staff are properly accountable and supported.
Administration records are maintained as required and the agency premises are suitable for their purpose. The agency appeared financially viable.
Quality in this outcome is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has recruited an experienced suitable qualified registered manager since the last inspection that is committed, efficient, professional, proactive, approachable and very child focused.
The registered manager has progressed the service in the short time since in post and has dealt with several sensitive issues since employment in an efficient professional manner.
The registered manager has enrolled on an appropriate management course equivalent to NVQ care level 4 in childcare.

Staff morale in the agency is good, open and inclusive and both carers and staff commented on how they feel all part of a team. Staff receive regular supervision and support and able to voice their views and opinions to the management team.
The registered manager is now receiving independent supervision monthly and has access to other support when required.

The agency employs suitably qualified staff to meet the needs of carers and children and carers stated they feel supported by the agencies link workers, however, the agency needs to recruit another social worker to help support the registered manager who is currently working long hours and being taken away from her role as a manager.

Comments from foster carers included:

"Whenever I contact the agency even if my social worker is not in the office the staff are all aware of any issues and support is excellent".

This is the benefit of a small agency."

"They are professional, reliable and experienced".

The support and team are second to none.

"Interested in my family and me, I feel part of a team. I enjoy carers group and training".

"We have made lots of friends, it's a family run business, helpful, loyal encouraging to us carers". "Friendly and always prepared to help at the drop of a hat". "This is a superb agency to work for".

The agency ensures that care plans are up to date with information, which detail the nature, and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and persons involved in care.

Local authority information was missing from some files but evidence was seen that the registered manager had written to the authorities to request this vital information.

Administration records were stored securely and protect carers, children and staff confidentiality. Examined diary sheets at one foster home confirmed foster parents record all relevant information including young peoples' achievements, educational, emotions, physical and dietary needs

The agency premises are decorated to a good standard but it was noted the agencies kitchen had a stale odour, which remained following a water leak in the premises.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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	3
2	4
4	3
5	4
16	4
17	2
18	3
19	3
20	4
21	3
22	3
23	4
24	2
25	3
26	3
27	3
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	FS24	40	The agency must ensure relevant information is received from the placing authority to safeguard children.	01/12/06
2	FS17	17	The agency must recruit sufficient staff to meet the needs of the service.	01/11/06

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.	FS17	The registered manager should obtain appropriate qualification in childcare management.
2	FS12	Foster carers should record foster children's social and emotional needs in daily diaries including one to one discussions.
3	FS26	The agency should address any odour in the agencies premises.
4	FS25	Incidents, accident, and complaint logs should be numbered and include signatures of staff completing the records for future reference.
5	FS12	Placing social workers could be sent a monthly report from

		carers/agency.
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Commission for Social Care Inspection

South Essex Local Office

Kingswood House

Baxter Avenue

Southend on Sea

Essex

SS2 6BG

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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