



*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 Inspection
18th July 2006 09:30

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	The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd
Address	8 London Road Sittingbourne Kent ME10 1NA
Telephone number	01795 470222
Fax number	01795 436181
Email address	eric.worton@excel2000.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	The Xcel 2000 Partnership Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Diane Gay
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 20th July 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Xcel 2000 is an Independent Fostering Agency as defined by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. There are currently thirty-eight foster carers approved by the agency, offering seventy-eight places. The agency offers foster placements for assessment, support, respite and rehabilitation guided by individual children's and young peoples ongoing care plan.

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 and Medway. They have now also diversified with satellite cores in Southend and South London. The fees for this service are £803.86 PW, depending on the requirements of the individual Local Authority.

SUMMARY

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

This was an announced Key inspection by one inspector Lucy Ansell who looked at detailed information provided by the service, and any information or concerns that CSCI had received. Time was spent case tracking and reviewing records kept within the agency; some of the staff and young people and foster carers were also interviewed.

During this visit to the agency the views through the receipt of questionnaires completed by placing authorities, young people and carers and the pre – inspection questionnaire, completed by the agency were looked at and used as evidence. These all evidenced satisfaction by the recipients of a good service.

The agency was inspected a year ago when a panel and a training session were observed. These were not inspected again since there were no outstanding requirements, or major changes in these areas since the last inspection. Policies and procedures were read and a selection of staff personnel files were also scrutinised.

Throughout the inspection process the agency's social workers, administrative and management team were very welcoming, open and receptive to the new inspection process.

Four foster homes who were visited and the many foster carers and young people who took part in the inspection are thanked for taking the time to speak to the inspector and to contributing positively to the inspection process.

The inspector also looked at the environment with a tour of the premises, these all combined will inform how well the service is meeting the standards set by the government and will decide overall how the service is rated.

What the service does well:

This is an agency whose strengths lay in the quality of the management team, with carers getting good support both formally and informally from the staff and management team. There are good systems of monitoring and quality assurance in place and the agency is always looking at new ways to improve its practice.

The staff all have a good understanding of the support needs of young people and foster carers as evidenced in the files and from talking to staff and carers. This is also evident from the positive encouragement and recognition of all of the young peoples' and the carer's achievements.

The agency's primary focus is on developing a tailor made service to enable the young people and their carers to succeed in their placements by giving them good support, and developing their independence and skills through good

quality training and supervision. One carer praised the agency and "identified how thorough they were and how every one felt part of a winning team".

What has improved since the last inspection?

The health standards have improved by the provision of good quality foster carer training and updated foster carer handbooks. A recommendation was made to show carers where consent forms for treatment and first aid are kept on files and this has been completed. The agency has worked on providing individual health passports for all children in placement and invested in a health audit as part of the healthy matters partnership.

The agency has recruited a more diverse range of carers in areas closer to London.

Improvements have been made in monitoring and recording of all information and carers are providing more information in their monthly reports.

The social work manager has now completed her NVQ 4 in management. The procedures for employment of independent social workers are now also much more robust.

What they could do better:

The agency has no requirements from this visit, only recommendations to further improve practice. There was evidence found that safe caring policies had started to be changed to become child specific rather than household specific and this needs to continue. The agency needs to ensure training is being attended and could use the panel to monitor attendance at the yearly reviews and to bring this issue back to panel if this needs to be reviewed mid year.

The children's files need to show clear contact arrangements and a good practice recommendation is for all contact to be recorded in the same place. There is a recommendation for clear audits trail to record in one place all Local Authority phone calls or letters chasing missing paperwork. The children's files would benefit from a clearer front sheet with date the placement started, type of court order and length of stay if known. A movement sheet within each child's file would also be beneficial. Many files for the children recorded foreign holidays and risk assessments or additions to the safe caring policy should be included for these types of activities.

A training matrix is available but is not on the foster carers' files so when the new reviews forms are in use the addition of this information on them will make case tracking of training easier.

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.

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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 at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

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

The young people can be confident that their health needs are well met and promotion of their health is taken seriously.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers demonstrated knowledge regarding young people's individual health care needs and the action taken to address these. Evidence was seen to confirm young people have been supported to access regular and specialist health care services.

The agency has informed carers of their local specialist nurses, and are now encouraging them to access the looked after children nurses. Any young person placed with the agency is enabled by the team to receive ongoing specialist health care services.

The agency is starting health passports these will hold information on the contact details of a child's GP, Dentist and Optician, any visits made to them, also any medication taken or specialist services accessed.

A recommendation was made last inspection to show carers where consent forms for treatment and first aid are kept on files and this has been completed. Evidence was found of consent for first aid or any required emergency treatment in foster carers files. Carers are required to notify the agency within their monthly reports of all accidents, injuries, illnesses and use of medication and this information is transferred into the agencies monitoring systems.

The foster carers handbook had been updated to include specific section on promotion of exercise and healthy lifestyles. In this is advice and information on anti drink and drugs, and promotion of good personal relationships and sexual health.

The agency has ensured good training is available for all carers in line with outcomes for Every Child Matters and being healthy. This ensures all foster carers are first aid trained.

The agency attends a best practice group and meetings are held to ensure they are following the Healthy Matters Agenda, and within this they have appointed an independent auditor to complete a Health Audit. There is also a Healthy Matters Partnership with Health professionals. The agency's foster carers and young people attend these meetings.

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 at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15,30-N/A

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

Children can be confident that the agency provides suitable carers and their needs will be well matched to the experience and skills of foster carers with whom they are placed.

Children are protected by the agency's robust child protection and staff recruitment systems and procedures.

EVIDENCE:

There was clear evidence seen in staff files that references are sent for and then followed up with a phone conversation, which is clearly recorded. Police checks are renewed every three years with a system in place to monitor this. On files records are kept of all mandatory checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes.

The agency's foster carers homes that were visited were very comfortable and homely. All children had single rooms unless specific arrangements reflected this. Thorough & detailed health & safety checking was evident throughout the initial assessment and ongoing annual checks as part of the carer annual review process.

Health & Safety is covered as a core subject throughout initial training. A very clear and detailed Health & Safety policy is within the Carers' Handbook. This includes guidance on within the home, outings & activities, prevention of infections and disease and HIV.

There is also a policy on 'Safe Care', which is extremely detailed and clear. The guidance within this need to be implemented in practice and it is further recommended that carers' own safe care policies be looked at as part of their annual review process to evidence they are individualised for each child. Carers are required to show evidence of insurance, MOT and tax of their own vehicles. Rules are very clear that all children must be suitably restrained in vehicles – seat belts, car seats, etc. A generous mileage allowance is paid. The Foster Care Agreement clearly states that carers may be visited by CSCI as part of the inspection process.

The agency can evidence clearly that the matching of the young people and the foster carers is completed, thoroughly and with great care. The young people are appropriately matched in terms of their religious, cultural and ethnic needs. The agency will write a report, taking into account all the assessed needs of the young person and will address how the carer is able to meet those needs and if there are any gaps in the match which need to be looked at. Evidence seen showed they can then arrange for additional training or support to provide the best possible placement and support to the foster family. The whole team is involved in the referral process and they can offer evidence of all relevant professionals being involved. Also where possible each child will have the opportunity for a planned introduction and all available information is given to the child on their future foster carers. One foster family spoken to had numerous meetings that were held between professionals, the carers and the previous placement. The young person joined the family through a phased introductory programme, which incorporated tea visits and overnight stays.

Clear and detailed child protection policies and procedures are in place. These are made readily available to all carers. Contact numbers for all area child protection teams are held and the agency's own 'Whistle blowing' policy is detailed and clear.

A sample of carer training records showed evidence of recently attending: – pre approval training on child protection, and a ten -week course on sexual abuse awareness. Explicit, clear guidance is in place with regard to corporal punishment and behaviour management. Evidence in carer files that the supervising social workers regularly provide ongoing advice and support in terms of how best to manage young peoples' behaviours was found.

The manager holds a very comprehensive file of all significant incidents/ allegations/ concerns. The content details the nature of the incident, how it is going to be, or was, managed, and is also used to explore how such situations may be avoided in the future. All such significant incidents are readily

communicated to placing authorities and the CSCI within the prescribed timescales.

Clear written guidance was in place regarding protecting from bullying and it was evident that carers receive appropriate training. Any issues or instances are discussed at supervision meetings. In addition, similar clear written guidance was found in the Handbook with regards the action to take upon a child being missing from the foster home.

Three staff personnel files were scrutinised alongside the agency's own recruitment policy and procedure. The files were indexed and easy to read, with full compliance noted against the Fostering Services Regulations 2001. With evidence of a thorough vetting procedure, identification checks and applicants possessing the skills and experience commensurate with their roles, children and carers can be confident that they are protected and supported by safe individuals. The agency has also been scrutinised by the Criminal Records Bureau spot inspection and they passed this. There was one recommendation to change filing cabinets to a more robust one but their systems were secure and well managed.

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-N/A

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

Children can be confident that the agency clearly values diversity among its carers and staff.

The young people benefit from a service that promotes educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The agency encourages recruitment of carers from diverse backgrounds and training to ensure all foster carers have the skills to preserve a child's heritage and background. The foster carers' handbook has information on promoting equality and diversity along with training. The agency ensures it has social workers from different ethnic backgrounds to ensure the service is promoting equality.

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 providing a children's co-ordinator. She was able to demonstrate the lengths they had gone to in finding appropriate school / college placements for those in their care, and at present only two local children do not have places. School uniform grants are provided by the agency, in order that those attending mainstream placements can immediately purchase the required clothing. Carers work hard to ensure there is excellent communication between themselves and the schools their child attends.

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

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

The young people benefit from an agency that promotes contact arrangements.

Children and their families can be confident that the agency will promote consultation with them at all times.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence was seen that the young people are encouraged to maintain contact with family and friends. Contact arrangements that had been agreed upon for each young person were included in their placement plans. Written guidance was available for foster carers covering matters in relation to their role in supporting children to maintain and develop constructive contact with their families and others. Where restrictions on contact had been made these were also articulated in young people's placement plans. The agency is also able to supply resource workers and drivers to support out of area placement contacts. The foster carers also promote letterbox, phone contact as well as sibling and interagency contacts. However this information was placed in lots of different areas through out of the file. The children's files need to show clear contact arrangements with maybe a sheet with all contact that is and isn't allowed, how this is arranged and what means of contact. A good practice recommendation is for all contact to be recorded in the same place.

When the inspector was talking to one young person she confirmed to the inspector that young people were asked for their views by the agency, usually

at the office. The agency also arranges in the holidays lots of family activities where they all meet up.

The young people, when they first come to the agency, are given a childrens guide with a complaint card and telephone numbers for direct access of who to complain to. There is information available in the foster carers handbook and childrens guide of useful contact numbers and organisations that represent young peoples' rights. During supervision with foster carers the supervising social worker will discuss the importance of listening to the views of the child in their care. If there are problems training and support can be sought or the team will access specialist help.

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):

This set of standards were not inspected.

EVIDENCE:

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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1,16,17,21,24,25. 32-N/A

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service.

Children can be assured that the service can meet its stated aims and objectives, and the management team are organised and effective.

Children can be confident that there is sufficient number of qualified staff, and there is a good quality-training program.

The foster carers benefit from clear strategies of how to work with children and support them.

The case records for the young people are comprehensive and administrative records well kept.

EVIDENCE:

The agency's statement of purpose is updated yearly and reviewed to ensure it contains all the required information as set out in standard 1.4 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards. It clearly states what services are provided for the young people placed by the service. The fostering service's policies and procedures along with guidance for staff and carers accurately reflect the statement of purpose.

The management team is organised so as to provide an efficient and effective service with everyone having set roles that are clear and well structured with clear lines of accountability. The manager has just completed her management qualification and the directors are all qualified social workers with extensive knowledge and experience to be able to support the carers, children and staff. The responsible individual has very sound management experience and oversees policies, procedures and all guidance and monitoring. Professional supervision and consultation as well as in-house supervision is provided for the managers and social work staff. The training and development is specifically tailored for all staff as well as attending carers training as required. The administrative back up provided is excellent and has been commented on by carers as welcoming, knowledgeable and good at their jobs. In staff files evidence was seen of copies of staff handbooks being signed and these contain relevant guidance, policies and procedures. The agency has improved the procedures for employment of independent social workers and sessional staff with practices that are much more robust. The comments received from placing officers were that the fostering social workers had a clear understanding of each other's role and were professional and easy to work along side.

A qualified experienced social worker has been recently recruited and this may help with many aspects of service provision that the agency felt had not been able to move further forward to further improve its practice. The agency is looking to employ one more social worker although they are fully staffed, to keep up with the expansion in the other locations. Overall the staff retention is excellent with most staff staying in post due to good working environment, training, supervision, terms and conditions.

It should be added that carers reported most positively in terms of the actual 'support' that has continually been provided, even when staffing has been an issue. One foster carer said the agency was "helpful, professional and supportive". The new carers recruited in another area "have always felt part of

the team and support phone calls were happening even when they have no placements". In assessing qualities and competences and aptitude for fostering written reports are compiled during skills to foster and competences are used for the form F and these all go to panel to be considered.

The fostering service has a clear written strategy for working with and supporting foster carers. Written evidence supported that all carers receive regular, recorded supervision from their agency is available in a separate file and has coloured sheets for unannounced visits. The agency also runs a rolling programme for every Wednesday which is the foster carer's day: Training for carers either formal or informal, Directors meeting when carers meet with the directors to discuss any issues, make suggestions, arrange outings. Then there is the carers' informal support group similar to a coffee morning, supervisory group meeting with their social workers in small groups. All of these run on alternate weeks and are very well supported and usually end with a nice lunch. The carers also see their social worker about every 5-6 weeks and receive weekly phone contact. There is also out of hours support run by the staff of the agency so carers will always know to whom they are talking and can be confident that the person they are speaking to has some knowledge of the child.

If the young people are not receiving formal education the agency can provide daytime support with a structured day for the young person to enable the carers to have a break. The agency also offers 21 days respite a year with another of the agency's carers.

There is also support for the birth children from the childrens services co-ordinator who can discuss any concerns or issues they may have. The agency also offers membership to a fostering network who offers support services and a quarterly magazine.

All carers had up to date comprehensive Foster Carer Agreements in place, which contained all the required details and all were conversant with the agency's complaints procedure.

Children's files contained most of the necessary information, files were ordered but these could be better monitored and audited to ensure continuity. The agency was able to evidence case recording sheets, which reflected the ongoing and very specific individual pieces of work and support in place for individual children. Carers were aware of the need to keep day-to-day records and also produced a monthly report for the agency and the child's social worker.

The children's files need to show clear contact arrangements and a good practice recommendation is for all contact to be recorded in the same place. There is a recommendation for clear audits trail to record in one place all Local Authority phone calls or letters chasing missing paperwork. The children's files

would benefit from a clearer front sheet with date the placement started, type of court order and length of stay if known. A movement sheet for the child would also be beneficial within the file. Many files for the children recorded foreign holidays and risk assessments or additions to the safe caring policy should be included for these types of activities.

The foster carers' files again were mainly well ordered and contained all the required information. A training matrix is available but is not on the foster carers files and so when the new reviews forms are in use the addition of this information on them will make case tracking of training easier. The safe caring policies seen were all for families not for individual children although the manager said these are all completed - evidence of this on file would be good. Again the front sheet for carers lacked basic information that is contained in the file but would be helpful to have at the front for ease of case tracking. This would be panel approval, placement details when this started.

Evidence was seen of separate records being kept for staff, young people, carers and complaints and allegations. There are systems in place to monitor quality assurance and confidential records are kept securely. The system for keeping records is congruent with the looking after children/integrated childrens system.

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	4
9	3
15	4
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	4

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	X
5	X
16	4
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	4
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	N/A

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

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.	FS10	To show clear contact arrangements and for all contact to be recorded in the same place.
2.	FS24	For clear audits trail to record in one place all Local Authority phone calls or letters chasing missing paperwork
3.	FS24	The childrens files would benefit from a clearer front sheet with date the placement started, type of court order and length of stay if known.
4.	FS24	A movement sheet for the child would also be beneficial within the file.
5.	FS24	Many files for the children recorded foreign holidays and risk assessments or additions to the safe caring policy should be included for these.
6.	FS9	The safe caring policies seen were all for families not for individual children although the manager said these are all completed evidence of this on file would be good.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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