



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Link

**159b Stoke Newington High Street
London
N16 0NY**

Lead Inspector
Bernard Burrell

Announced Inspection
3rd October 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

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Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 21st November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Link is an independent fostering service based in the Stoke Newington area of the London Borough of Hackney. The Commission of Social Care Inspection registered the Agency in February 2004. This is the agencies third inspection since registration.

Foster Care Link stated objective is to become the alternative choice for placing authorities that are finding it difficult to match and place Muslim, Asian, Black and Ethnic Minority children from their own resources. At march 31, 2006, the agency had 36 approved foster care places, 9 were filled, 16 were vacant and 11 were non-available places.

At the time of this inspection, the agency daily service operations were staffed by the Registered Provider, an office manager/administrator, and a senior social worker and support worker.

The agency offers long, short stay and emergency placements. The rates charged for the care of each child/young person range from £721 to £773.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place at the agency's office over four days. This also involved contact and communication with foster carers and the fostered young people.

The inspection process was assisted with contributions from the agency management and staff. The inspector reviewed a number of case records for the foster carers, the children and young people. The pre-inspection questionnaires completed by the agency were also used as part of this inspection. The inspector also received written feedback from foster carers and the young people.

The inspection findings indicated that the agency is providing an invaluable service that is targeted to the specific cultural, religious and welfare needs of children and young people from Muslim backgrounds and ethnicity.

What the service does well:

The agency staff have a good track record of providing placements that help to achieve positive stability and outcomes for the fostered children and young people.

The agency staff also have sound awareness and understanding of the Muslim community and is therefore able to find foster carers who are able to work with the children and young people to help meet their cultural, religious and ethnic needs. The agency workers are also committed to deliver a service appropriate to the needs of the children and young people placed and the wider community.

The agency has shown willingness to comply with regulatory requirements and other recommendations to help develop and improve the services and the outcomes for the children and young people.

The agency maintains and continues to develop constructive and beneficial relationships with its foster carers and placing authorities, plus keeping the children and young people in their local communities where possible.

Foster Care Link also provides relevant advice and support to the children and foster carers. The agency is also actively involved in advocating for the children and young people, including communication with local authority social services workers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency continues to improve and upgrade its policy and procedure guidelines, this includes its Whistle blowing policy. It now provides users with information and guide about agencies that can be contacted to register their concerns or complaints.

Foster carers, the children and young people reported they continue receive good support from the agency staff.

The agency is now making good efforts to seek and include the views of the fostered children and young people during review meetings and home visits.

The agency panel procedure has improved and is now operated with evidence of careful analysis and reviews of the information provided about each potential new carer.

What they could do better:

The agency must ensure that all children and young people placed have an up to date care plan that is generated from full assessment of care needs. The care plans must be available when the children and young people are placed or soon after. They must be fully understood by the carers, children and young people.

The agency must ensure that the placing authorities provide all relevant background information, including health and immunisation checks at the time of placement. If not, the agency must apply more proactive effort and follow-ups to help ensure that all children and young people have access to full medical checks and registration with GPs soon after placements are made.

The agency must also ensure that all carers fully understand the relevance of promoting and safeguarding the health care needs of children and young people. The supervisory home visits and reviews must adequately review the health and emotional care needs of the fostered children, young people and the foster carers. There must also be satisfactory documented evidence on case files to verify the reviews carried out plus the areas covered during the supervisory home visits.

The agency must also improve its monitoring of health medical reports/assessments in liaison with local authorities who placed the children and young people. Foster carers must also be more actively supported in accessing specific assessments where necessary. This will help ensure more positive outcomes in the health care of all the children and young people.

The agency should consider including a brief summary guidance in the children and young people's guide about the cultivation of good health, nutrition and wellbeing.

The agency must continue its effort to work with the foster carers, placing authorities and schools to help achieve better educational outcomes of all the children and young people placed, especially those not attending full-time education or not currently performing to their maximum potential.

The agency should ensure that there is always clarity about the purpose of contact, desired frequency and who needs to be involved.

The agency must ensure that Pathway Plans are prepared, up to date and on case files for those young people preparing to leave care. This plan must have the full input of all parties concerned with the future and welfare of each young person.

The agency must ensure that its administrative records are better maintained. This should include ensuring that all relevant records are signed and dated, essential documents are available on case files, plus a full audit is carried out of its administrative records and procedures.

The agency should ensure more work is done to help the foster carers to form a support group to help develop and share experiences, skills, knowledge and information.

Several recommendations from the previous inspection report were still outstanding at the time of this inspection. The provider indicated in the action plan that plans were either in place or been considered to address these. Most have been repeated in this report.

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

The quality outcome rating for this section is adequate. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children and young people.

The agency ensures foster carers are provided with a policy guideline about promoting the health of the children and young people. There was evidence of medical appointments carried out for several children and young people.

However, more work is needed to help ensure that the health care needs, care plans and monitoring of all children and young people becomes a central core of all placement agreements. There must also be more effective and analytical health monitoring system in place. This should enable clear and systematic audit trail and tracking of the health and emotional wellbeing of each child and young person.

EVIDENCE:

In the Foster Carer's Guide, there was a Health & Safety Assessment on Foster Home Guideline produced by the Child Accident Prevention Trust. The inspector judged this policy document to be too general and needed to be more specific to the agency's expectations from each foster carer about the monitoring and promotion of the health of fostered children in their care.

There is also a policy on promoting the development and health of children in foster care. The guide states that its has been produced to outline to children, parents, foster carers and social workers, the policy of Foster Care Link about the promotion and development of the health of children in foster care.

This guide should not be aim at foster children, but foster carers and the supervising social workers. The agency should consider adding a brief

summary guidance in the children and young people's guide about how children and young people can help to look after their health and wellbeing.

Six children's files were inspected for this standard. One group of 3 siblings, two children placed in the same foster care home and one other child in another home.

The notes from a review meeting held on 20 September 2006 for one young person stated that his 'health is good and he eats healthy'. It also stated that the LAC medical papers are to be passed to the carers, which is then to be passed on to the GP. There were recorded information about a recent health problem, including dental appointment booked for October 3 (but was not kept because of Ramadan) and an optician appointment booked for 19 October'. However, there was no indication of how the health outcomes would be measured in this and other cases reviewed by the inspector.

In another case, a placement started on the 4/09/06. However, there was no information about the child's GP on the referral/matching form, the placement summary sheet or the health section of the file. The record showed that this placement was planned and also an out of borough placement.

In addition, there was also no information except (Not/Applicable) recorded in the medical section of the referral/matching form. The note seen on file showed that a dental appointment on 27/09/06, but child did not want to attend because of Ramadan fasting. The supervisory record showed that the placement agreement meeting held on 12 September 2006 mentioned that dental and optical tests to be undertaken, plus registration with local GP and that the LAC medical was due. However, there was no indication of the timescale when these would be done.

For another child with a placement made on 07/09/06, there was no detail of registration with a GP. The notes in section 9 of the form stated –not known– and that the child would be registered with GP as soon as possible. This child had no previous placement. The LAC care plan provided by the placing authority had very basic information such as 'the child likes Halal food' but no details of any health care professional involvement or care plan.

The placement planning meeting notes of 20/09/06 recorded "no conditions". A letter on file from the placing authority Unaccompanied Minors team dated 07/9/06 advised that an appointment should be within two weeks to the carers family doctor. A form AR13 was reportedly enclosed for the GP to complete and return.

The review of the case file for another unaccompanied minor placed in the same foster care home, had no details of the child's legal status plus no details of any previous placement. The inspector noted that the recording showed that

no information was known about the child's previous physical, sexual or emotional history. The medical section was therefore not completed.

In addition, the notes for this young person indicated that on 12/09/06 a call was received from the carer by the agency to say that the young person was taken to a dentist who advised that he would need further appointments to complete his treatment. The placement planning notes of 18/9/06 also mentioned that LAC review was not done.

In another case reviewed by the inspector, a sibling group of three young people was placed in the same foster carer home. However, no referral matching form was in the case files. The meeting Notes of 03/05/06 recorded that the carer took one of the young person to the dentist on 30/04/06. The LAC Care Plan from the placing authority was dated 25/11/05 but had very minimal information about the young person's health care needs or action plans. The inspector noted there was a letter on file from the paediatric department of a local hospital relating to an appointment for one of the siblings on 11/10/05 plus an optical prescription statement dated 12/05/06.

The review meeting notes of 24/07/ 06 mentioned that medical appointment was to be done on 25/07/06 for another sibling, but no information about whom would be responsible. In addition, the supervisory social worker's notes of 01 and 04/09/ 06 had no mention of any health care issues relating to any of the of the siblings.

The inspector noted that the record on the LAC form completed by the placing authority on 12/01/05 and 22/11/05 stated that the father is diabetic. However, no information was seen on the case files to indicate if the young people placed had tests to determine their diabetic status.

The agency must improve its monitoring of health medical reports/assessments in liaison with local authorities who placed the children and young people. Foster carers must also be more actively supported in accessing specific assessments where necessary. This will help ensure more positive outcomes in the health care of all the children and young people placed.

In addition, for one of the siblings, there was an appointment letter from the orthopaedic section of a local hospital in the later part of September and October 2005. However, no additional information or updates was seen on the file about the young person's health status or the outcome of this appointment.

The views of one of the siblings recorded on 13/02/06 quoted one young person has saying that 'the food is good.' In addition, the supervisor notes mentioned the siblings emotional state as 'secure and cheerful' in the placement.

The review of another carers' records showed that this carer was approved in August 2005. The medical check for this carer recorded as completed in July 2005. The general health section in the foster carers application recorded no health issues. The initial health and safety checklist of the home was carried out in April 2005 with several recommendations for improvement. The supervising social worker's visit report on 25/09 had no mention or updates in the health and safety section about the above.

The inspector noted that this carer telephoned the agency on 12/09/06 to say she had taken the child to the dentist for treatment with plans for follow-ups. In addition, the notes from the support worker's visit on 28 September 2006 recorded that: the child's emotional state was cause for concern and that he needed some therapy support, particularly as he was also 'not eating well and talked about killing himself.' However, there was no evidence of action plan or notes to verify the above has been recorded, or referred to the supervising social workers or other professionals including CAMHS for follow-up.

There was recorded evidence of the carer giving consent for relevant checks, including medical to be take. There was also evidence of the agency writing to her GP to provide a medical report.

The inspection of another carers file showed that the general health section of the carer's application completed in September 2004. There was evidence from the foster carer's review notes of 15/03/06 showing that both carers had medical checks in November 2004.

The safe Caring guideline for these carers recorded that they are not able to care for children with HIV/AIDS. The competency Section for the Form F assessment stated that applicants would be offered training in health promotion of fostered children and young people. The training record showed that health and safety was undertaken in September 2004 and First Aid in January 2006.

In addition, the notes from the supervisory visit carried out 19/09/06- indicated carers would need to address the following issues within a week; GP, dentist, optician. In addition, previous placement agreement meeting notes dated 12/09/2006 showed that all key health checks for the fostered children were due at time of inspection, including registration with GP.

The inspector noted that the Foster Carer's Agreement signed by carers had no information about responsibility for promoting the health of each child and young person. There was also no evidence of food and hygiene training and the case file index had no information about Carer's health checks.

The agency will need to ensure it carries out a review of all areas related to health, safety and hygiene for all carers, including ensuring no child or young

person is placed with carers without health care plans, or action in place to have these in place. The review should also aim to ensure there is systematic recording of the health and emotional needs and status of the children, young people and foster carers.

The agency should consider including a brief summary guidance in the children and young people's guide about the cultivation of good health, nutrition and wellbeing.

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.

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children and young people.

The people working in and for the agency have the necessary skill, experience and knowledge to provide a safe and effective service that benefits the children and young people.

Additional work is needed to help ensure that all required records and checks are available for each panel members.

EVIDENCE:

The people working in the agency collectively have the necessary experience and background to carry on the service. The staff have a combination of management, information technology and social work professional experiences, skills and training.

The agency recruits foster carers mainly from the Muslim community. It also offers a service that is largely but not exclusively aim at looked after children and young people from Muslim background. The evidence examined on case files, plus discussions with carers and the managers of the agency, indicated that the carers are able to demonstrate their understanding of the Muslim

customs, traditions, culture and religion when dealing with the fostered children and young people.

The inspector reviewed the case files of three carers from a list of 6. A husband and wife foster carers had three siblings at the time of the inspection. A single carer had one and another husband and wife other couple had 1 child.

The inspector reviewed the recruitment records for each carer, including the Form F assessments. The findings were that the agency recruitment procedure involve a completed application that covers key areas such as health and home safety risks assessments, personal security checks, including CRB and local authority checks. There was an action plan on each health and safety home assessment outlining tasks that had to be carried out by the carers before placements can be made.

In addition, there was evidence of a completed Referral/Matching form on each child/young person's case file. The inspection findings identified minor shortfalls in the completed forms. They were done in hand writing and were difficult to read in a few cases. In addition, a number of key sections and important background information such as health and safety background information about few of the children and young people were not known.

In the section that asked if the placement offered meets the young persons culture/language, the agency should consider adding the 'identified or presenting care needs of the children/young people to be placed. The agency should also ensure that clear explanations other than 'yes' or 'no' are recorded to help ensure the suitability of the carers and placements.

There was evidence of relevant training offered to the carers to help develop their awareness, knowledge and skills in fostering. The evidence reviewed also showed that each carer is required to complete a self-assessment on their awareness and understanding of safe caring, health and safety issues, child protection, child care law and legislation.

The competencies to foster assessment was also completed for each foster carer with action plan about the training support planned by the agency to developed identified weakness and shortfalls among the carers. Each foster carer is also given a Safe Care Action Plan.

One of the main objectives of the agency is to provide the looked after children and young people with foster carers who are either Muslims or able to provide a Muslim family based environment for the children and young people.

The inspector noted from the minutes of three panel meetings that careful analysis and review of the information about each carer is made to help determine their suitability. There was recorded evidence of pre-placement meetings carried out by the agency staff with the foster carers, including discussions about placement matching.

The documented evidence reviewed by the inspector also showed that relevant security and police checks and other references are carried out for each carer, including other adults in the foster care homes.

The inspector noted from the documented evidence reviewed that the supervising social worker carries out regular communication contacts, including supervisory home visits to the carers, foster children and young people. In one example, there were recorded notes of minor and repeated conflicts involving looked after children and the sibling of one carer. The evidence showed that the agency staff and carers carried out appropriate actions to resolve these matters satisfactorily.

There was an agency policy and procedural guidelines for the panel members. This covered all the key areas of a panel operation according to the Fostering Services Regulation 2002.

The current membership of the panel at the time of this inspection included individuals with professional experience and skills in social work, education and childcare plus a member who was once fostered. The manager indicated there is plan to replace this member because of poor attendance at the panel meetings.

The inspector reviewed the personal profile information for each panel member. The findings showed that some key information, including CV and results of statutory checks were maintained for each member. However, for two members, their CVs were the same. The director stated this is because they both do the same joint consultancy work. This will need changing and individual CV must be available for each member. The CRBs for these two members were last issued November and December 2003 and were due for updating. Equally, the CRBs for several other members were issued more than three years ago and needed updating.

There was no recorded evidence to show the start date each member joined the panel. In addition, there was no documented evidence of training, references, contracts or signed confidentiality statements.

The inspector reviewed the minutes of the last panel meeting held in April 2006 prior to this inspection. The findings indicated that there is need for the to have summary recordings explanation of the reasons for the decisions or recommendations made, including placement matching.

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

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children and young people.

The agency makes good effort to find foster placements that meets the diversified needs of children and young people from different Muslim backgrounds. It also works to promote better awareness and understanding of the needs foster children and young people and their carers who are Muslim.

Good effort is also made to support and encourage the children and young people to develop their learning and educational potential and abilities. However, additional work is needed to help ensure all children are fully supported to pursue and achieve their full learning and educational potential, including additional out of school support where needed.

EVIDENCE:

The agency's statement of purpose and foster carers guide listed its stated objectives in relation to diversity and equal opportunity- as aiming to ensure that it places children and young people with carers and in homes that are reflective of their assessed racial, ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background wherever possible. This includes 'sensitivity to the sects of Islam and the specific identities of other communities.'

The agency's policy also stated it aims to work with other agencies and placing authorities to ensure positive understanding of each child's/young person's heritage. It stated its objectives is also to work and challenge discrimination, promote equality and support children and carers to maintain their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. It also stated that it aims to offer appropriate training to foster carers in diversity issues

The inspection findings from the dataset information provided by the agency showed that at the time of this inspection, there were 15 active foster carers currently registered as either having children/young people in their foster care, or available to foster. Overall, the agency reported it had 36 approved places, 9 were filled, 16 had vacancies and 11 were not available to foster.

Of the above number, 1 carer was from white and Asian background, 4 were from Indian, 6 from Pakistani, 3 from Bangladesh and 1 black African.

The inspector analysed the evidence produced by the agency and carers relating to the education of the fostered children and young people. This showed that as of March 31, 2006, there were 7 children and young people of school age in mainstream schools. At the time of this inspection, 3 children were not attending school. These were new placements started September 2006.

The record also showed that the attendance record for the majority of the children and young people in school has been very good, but concerns about the 'punctuality, attendance and focus' of one young person has been recorded by the school.

The inspector noted that the Personal Education Plans (PEP) for 5 of the children and young people were missing. There was a PEP report for one young person dated May 2006 and for two others, there were academic reports for summer 2006. For one young person, the report showed evidence of satisfactory achievement in a range of key subjects such as English, science and art. However, the report noted that the school had 'concerns' about the key stage level of achievement in subjects such as maths, technology and languages. For another young person, the report also showed concerns about his performance in several subjects including science.

In contrast, the GCSE results for one other young person from a sibling group of 3 showed excellent levels of achievements and passes. This young person has received a looked after children high educational achievement commendation and reward from her local borough.

The foster carers told the inspector that all three children had the potential to make even better progress and that they offer them relevant support. The agency's supervising social worker and manager also informed the inspector of

the additional support that was been offered to help the young people in their educational work.

The inspector noted that the educational needs of two other fostered children who are unaccompanied minors did not appear to be receiving serious attention and support from the placing social services in Croydon. The supervising social worker from the agency informed the inspector that several requests have been made to the placing authority to address these concerns. The agency has also made efforts to identify educational support, including links to local library.

The inspection findings indicated better coordinated effort and action plans will be needed to address these children's educational, learning and developmental needs, including more support to carers whose English language skill and understanding of the educational system needs improvement.

The review notes from the meeting held on 20/9/06 stated that 'prospectus of Croydon Council to be attained for course in January...FCL support worker to action. In the meantime, educational alternatives to be address at a refugee society.' The notes also stated that the duty social worker from the placing authority would be making contact with the agency regarding the PEP for the children who were not in school.

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

The quality outcome rating for this section is good. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children and young people.

The agency promotes and supports contacts where appropriate. More effort is however needed to help ensure contact arrangements are agreed and understood by everyone concerned.

Good effort is made by the agency staff to cultivate and promote beneficial working partnerships with other agencies, including social services on behalf of the children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector reviewed the contact arrangements for a group of 3 siblings and noted that they have regular planned and unplanned visits to their birth mother. The reports from the supervising social worker and foster carers are that the contact arrangements have been considered safe and beneficial for the siblings. This was also verified by one of the 3 siblings. The carers also reported they have developed a cordial relationship with the children's mother.

The evidence from two of the other three young people's case records reviewed by the inspector, showed two as unaccompanied minors and therefore had no contacts with relatives in the UK. For another young person, the initial referral matching record indicated that it was 'proposed that he would have some form of contact with his family who lived near to his previous foster carer's house.' No updates from the supervisory visits have been recorded about this plan, except written record of the young person making

contacts with his friends. The recordings also showed that the carers sought 'clarification about the arrangements for friends visiting the fostered young people.'

The inspection findings plus discussion with various staff at the agency indicated that regular consultation have taken place with various professionals and agencies, including social services, support groups, religious organisations and educational agencies. There was also recorded evidence plus reports from a few young people to verify that the agency staff seek their views about their placements and other issues related to their wellbeing.

There was also evidence of complaints made by a few young people either to their local authority social workers or the agency staff. The recorded evidence showed of the complaints that have been investigated by the agency staff and the actions taken to resolve issues or concerns.

The children and young people's guides also have guidance and information about what to do if they have concerns, problems or want to make complaint.

The inspector noted that there were a range of recorded letters and notes of communication between the agency and external organisations, including various social services, schools, foster carers and religious and cultural bodies. Many of these contacts and consultations were made on behalf of the children and young people, particularly those who are asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors.

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 quality outcome rating for this section is adequate. This judgement is based on the evidence and records provided by the service and reviewed by the inspector, plus analysis of the written and expressed views of carers, children and young people.

There was evidence of proactive work been done to help young people preparing for the transition to adult and semi-independent living. However, the agency needs to be more proactive and work with all agencies and professionals concerned to ensure that required Pathway Plans are completed and up to date.

The agency pays its foster carers in line with contractual arrangements and timely.

EVIDENCE:

The agency foster carer's guide has a policy guide with information relating to preparing young people for adulthood. The policy covers social issues, emotional and behavioural development and self-care skills.

The manager informed the inspector that 8 carers attended the Leaving Care training held in September 2006 and facilitated by an independent trainer.

One of the young people at the foster home visited by the inspector was in the process of preparing the move to independent living. There was also consideration that she might return to live with her mother.

The recorded evidence on the young person's case file indicated a referral was been made to the leaving care team of the placing social services. There was also plan for the children social worker and the young person to complete a

needs assessment. However, no record of a pathway planning found in this young person's case file.

However, the foster carers informed the inspector that they offer guidance and advice to the young people in their care about learning and developing independent living skills. The inspector was shown evidence of the young person financial savings and information about how money had been spent.

In another case, the supervisory case recording for a 15 year old fostered young person did not have any information to indicate what support is been offered by the carer to help develop the young person's independent living skills. There was also no record of a pathway/parallel planning, as this young person's immigration status was not decided at the time of this inspection.

For another young person aged 15, the review notes of 20 September 2006 stated in the independence section that the young person 'does not help around the house but is willing and that the young person is to look at independent skills.'

The findings did not indicate who was to take responsibility for helping this young person with learning independent living skills or what skills the young person already has. The absence of a pathway and parallel plan also made it difficult for the inspector to make an informed judgement in this and some other areas of the lives of the young people's cases reviewed.

The feedback from the foster carers indicated that the agency pays them the contractual allowances and fees on time. The agency also advocates on behalf of the foster children and young people in cases where additional funding and financial support are needed.

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):

2, 4, 5, 17, 21, 24, 25,

EVIDENCE:

The findings of this inspection are that the agency is managed well and has good management, auditing and accountability systems and procedures in place. The manager has extensive experience in children social work with a

good professional track record working in local authority children services. The administration staff and the Registered Provider, plus other senior staff have relevant professional training, skills and background experience that enable them to carry out their roles and responsibilities in the agency.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had one full-time supervising social worker with responsibility for carrying out assessment and reviews plus other social work responsibilities and support to fostered children, young people and their carers. In addition, other staff in the management team also provide support to the carers. An outreach worker who worked part-time also provided additional support to a new carer at the time of this inspection. The manager informed the inspector plans were in place to recruit an additional social worker.

The inspector noted that the agency is able to operate and service its users effectively because of its current size and the specific population of fostered children, young people and carers that it serves.

There is formal arrangement between the agency and each foster carer about the nature and level of support they can expect to receive. The agency provided recorded evidence of how it works to support foster carers. The process includes planned and unplanned home visits, training, supervision, advocacy and advice. The foster carers confirmed in writing and verbally to the inspector that they are very satisfied with the level, consistency and reliability of support offered by the agency staff. One carer informed the inspector that the agency 'provide the appropriate training, accreditation and support to enable us to care for the children and provide them with a stable, caring family environment and ensure their basic human needs are met.'

Another carer wrote that the agency should aim to provide more 'customised training courses and also arrange a support network for all the foster carers.' The inspector noted from discussion with the manager that this issue remained outstanding at the time of this inspection, although the agency has indicated that it recognise the need for this support group.

The inspector examined the case records for several looked after children/young people and their foster carers. The findings indicated these were generally organised, but in a few cases essential documentations such as health care plans, Pathway Planning, PEPS and updated recording notes were missing. A few reviews were outstanding at the time of this inspection. In addition, photographic identification for some carers and the fostered children, plus home insurance information for at least one foster carer were missing from a case files.

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	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	2
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	2
29	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

YES

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS12	11	<p>The registered manager must ensure that the placing authority completes all LAC documents, including medical information. Previous timescale 30/01/06. Repeated with additional requirements of:</p> <p>The agency must ensure that all children and young people placed have an up to date care plan that is generated from full assessment of care needs. The care plans must be available when the children and young people are placed or soon after. They must be fully understood by the carers, children and young people.</p> <p>The agency must ensure that the placing authorities provide all relevant background information, including health and immunisation checks at the time of placement. If not, the agency must apply more proactive effort and follow-ups to help ensure that all children and young people have access to full medical checks and registration</p>	29/02/07

			<p>with GPs soon after placements are made.</p> <p>The agency must also ensure that all carers fully understand the relevance of promoting and safeguarding the health care needs of children and young people.</p> <p>The supervisory home visits and reviews must adequately review the health and emotional care needs of the fostered children, young people and the foster carers.</p> <p>There must also be satisfactory documented evidence on case files to verify the reviews carried out plus the areas covered during the supervisory home visits.</p>	
2	FS13	16	<p>The agency must continue its effort to work with the foster carers, placing authorities and schools to help achieve better educational outcomes of all the children and young people placed, especially those not attending full-time education or not currently performing to their maximum potential.</p> <p>Additional after school support and tuition must be provided to any young person or child who needs it.</p>	29/02/07
3	FS30	20, 24, 25, 27, 32	<p>The agency must ensure that the required professional verification checks and training for each panel members are up to date and copies available on their individual files.</p> <p>The agency must also ensure that the written records of each panel meeting include the reasons for the panel's matching</p>	29/02/07

			placements decisions and recommendations.	
4	FS14	30,32	The agency must ensure that Pathway Plans are prepared, up to date and on case files for those young people preparing to leave care. This plan must have the full input of all parties concerned with the future and welfare of each young person.	29/02/07
5	FS17	21	The agency must ensure that the staffing of the agency is adequate at all times to meet the needs and stated objectives of the service, in particular been able to offer consistent and reliable supervisory social work support to the foster carers, children and young people.	29/02/07
6	FS25	22,30	The agency must ensure that its administrative records are better maintained. This should include ensuring that all relevant records are signed and dated, essential documents are available on case files, plus a full audit is carried out of its administrative records and procedures.	29/02/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS12	It is recommended that the agency use one central format to track any medical appointments or issues.
2.	FS6	It is recommended that all Health and Safety forms are signed in accordance with the agency's policy
3.	FS13	It is recommended that the agency formalized recording to accurately reflect the attainments of the young people being looked after.
4.	FS22	It is recommended that the agency develop the carers support groups to encourage foster carers to discuss issues openly and gain support from each other.
5.	FS20	It is recommended that the supervision reports contain more detail; observations and that agendas are developed from the information retained on carers and young people files.
6.	FS30	It is recommended that the panel meet more frequently to ensure that assessments and reviews are presented in a timely fashion.
7.	FS4	The agency should consider including a brief summary guidance in the children and young people's guide about the cultivation of good health, nutrition and wellbeing.
8.	FS10	The agency should ensure that there is always clarity about the purpose of contact, desired frequency and who needs to be involved.

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