



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Foster Care Associates Thames Valley**

**Hale Court  
Hale Road  
Wendover  
Bucks  
HP22 6NJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
**Mr Rob Smith**

*Announced Inspection*  
**20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> March 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](http://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](http://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

<b>Name of service</b>	Foster Care Associates Thames Valley
<b>Address</b>	Hale Court Hale Road Wendover Bucks HP22 6NJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01296 628300
<b>Fax number</b>	01296 622372
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Provider Web address</b>	<a href="http://www.thefca.co.uk">www.thefca.co.uk</a>
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Foster Care Associates Ltd
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mrs Sara Chambers-Ross
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      7th March 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates Thames Valley (FCATV) is registered as an independent fostering agency. It is part of Foster Care Associates, a national organisation providing family placements and a broad range of associated services to local authorities across the country.

FCATV operates from Wendover, with offices in Reading and Bletchley, which provide locally based support services. The tasks undertaken by the offices do not, at the present time, require these to be registered as separate branches.

Services provided by FCATV include the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers, placement support with supervising social workers, training, educational liaison, therapeutic and resource worker services.

The agency had traditionally offered placements to more complex and challenging young people, providing an in-house package of integrated foster care, educational and therapeutic support. In response to changing local authority demands more straightforward, and less expensive, 'foundation' placements were also now being offered which at least initially would not involve the usual full package of additional input and support.

Statistics provided by the agency indicated that in February 2006 the branch had 63 carers approved currently providing 79 placements. A further 16 carers were in the process of assessment at this time.

# SUMMARY

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

This was an announced inspection conducted over a period of five days with one additional earlier visit to observe the fostering panel. The inspection comprised the following main activities:

- consideration of pre-inspection questionnaire and self-assessment information submitted by the branch manager;
- consideration of questionnaires completed by carers (29 received), children (24 received) and placing authorities (32 received);
- interviews with branch manager and a selection of senior central management and administrative staff;
- visits to and interviews with carers and placed young people in four carer households;
- visits to the branch headquarters and two area offices;
- interviews with a range of social work and support staff in the two area offices;
- observation of fostering panel;
- group discussion with carers attending a training course; and
- scrutiny of a sample of staff, carer and children's files and central administrative records.

## What the service does well:

The overall finding of this inspection is that the agency provides a high quality service to carers and young people. This judgement was supported primarily by the overwhelmingly positive nature of the feedback received in questionnaires and substantiated by the evidence obtained during the fieldwork undertaken during the inspection.

The agency does well in many areas of practice but the following were worthy of particular note:

- there was an excellent structure of support for carers;
- there was very good support for young people's educational achievement;

- rigorous attention was paid to ensuring the safety of children in placement and responding to emerging concerns;
- there were good systems in place for monitoring the quality of service provision; and
- good attention was being paid to improving support and development opportunities for young people leaving care.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The last inspection report had not identified any areas of significant concern and the minor requirements made had been met by the time of this visit.

The agency had also made improvements in the following areas:

- a more effective approach to planning and managing the needs of children leaving care had been introduced;
- a new recruitment manager was in place with a brief to oversee and improve the management, quality and consistency of carer recruitment and assessment processes; and
- the branch headquarters accommodation had been rearranged to provide better areas for use by children and carers

## **What they could do better:**

This inspection did not identify any significant areas of concern warranting formal requirement. In terms of good practice advice the following points were identified.

Some aspects of panel discussion management and focus would benefit from improvement to make best use of the limited time available and the input of applicants.

Information on how to contact CSCI would benefit from updating to include national rather than local contact numbers and addresses.

More consistent attention needed to be paid to updating of foster carer agreements following any change in approvals.

The issuing of formal notifications following review or termination of carer approvals needed to be extended to include area authorities.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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Being Healthy

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Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

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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 fostering service helped ensure, through a variety of means, that the health and development of placed children was consistently promoted.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Examination of a small sample of children's files confirmed that they were appropriately and promptly registered with GPs, dentists, opticians etc once placed with carers. Examination of children's review minutes and discussion with children and carers confirmed regular health checks were carried out either as part of normal health screening, for example in schools, or as part of additional specialist input as and when required. Specialist medical or health input was obtained in negotiation with placing authorities where needed.

Input from FCA's own in-house therapy services was a standard part of most placement packages. This offered both direct therapeutic input to young people and advice and support to carers on managing more challenging and needy young people. Ongoing monitoring of the meeting of children's individual needs in placement was effected through the regular 'team parenting' meetings held to pull together and monitor the various strands of agency input to individual placements.

Children's questionnaire feedback indicated they were encouraged by carers to eat healthily and exercise, even if reluctant to do so at times! FCA provided children with a personal health record to ensure consistent holding and passing on of key health facts and information about themselves.

The ongoing foster carer training schedule included appropriate elements addressing the health of children, for example the safety and well being of children, first aid and sexual health matters.

# Staying Safe

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

**The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 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 and 30

The fostering service was judged to be managed and carried on by appropriate persons.

The fostering service ensured carer households were suitable to meet the needs of placed children and young people.

Careful consideration was paid to ensuring as far as possible children's' needs could be met by the carers matched with them.

The fostering service was rigorous in its approach to protecting children from abuse or neglect.

The fostering service's approach to recruitment of staff and carers was thorough and consistent, helping ensure their suitability for roles undertaken.

The service's fostering panel operated in a largely effective manner.

## **EVIDENCE:**

FCA is an established national fostering organisation subject to repeated CSCI registration and inspection input, which has established the overall suitability of senior central staff and management to be carrying on a fostering service.

A new local branch manager had recently been registered. This process established her fitness for the role and confirmed that suitable checks had been carried out.

The suitability and safety of foster carer household settings was thoroughly assessed in the course of initial carer assessment and approval processes and subsequently thorough ongoing supervision, unannounced visits and household reviews. Specific attention was paid to monitoring all relevant aspects of health and safety matters and these issues were also addressed in initial and ongoing carer training schedules. No obvious health and safety concerns were noted during the visits to the sample of carer households.

Appropriate consideration was paid to the risks involved in bedroom sharing as part of placement matching and planning and incorporated, where relevant, into safe caring guidelines.

Feedback from carers in interviews and questionnaires supported the view held by staff that careful consideration was paid to ensuring good matches between carers and placed children. This process was overseen, in the first place, by the local placements manager, responsible for identifying carers matching the placement requests made by local authorities, and then progressed by the supervising social workers for the families concerned.

FCA was adopting an approach of approving carers, where appropriate to their wishes and circumstances, for broader age ranges than previously. This was to enable greater flexibility in consideration of placements based on children's needs, rather than simply chronological age, as well as avoiding bureaucratic processes when children, established and secure in placements, reached particular age approval boundaries or sibling groups were being considered. Within these broader ranges indication was still given of preferred matching criteria. While this less prescriptive approach to approval terms held some potential risks, the inspector recognised the benefits of the initiative and was reassured by feedback from staff and carers that due and careful regard was still being paid to preferred matching criteria. The impact of the new approach will continue to be evaluated at subsequent inspections.

Carers confirmed that overall they were provided with good information about prospective placements and that introduction processes were managed well. Such problems as arose were attributed by carers to placing local authorities failing to provide adequate information, rather than FCA itself. Written placements agreements were seen to be in place on children's and carer files identifying, where relevant, areas of shortfall in matching and how they were to be met.

The fostering service had appropriately detailed policies and procedures in place to deal with concerns of a child protection nature arising in foster carer households. This was backed up by relevant training for staff and foster carers

on child protection and safe caring. Safe caring guidelines were expected to be in place for each household and seen to be on file for the sample of carers visited during this inspection.

Clear guidance was offered by the agency on acceptable means of discipline, again supported by relevant training opportunities. Management of bullying and unauthorised absences from the foster home were also covered by clear guidance and procedures for foster carers.

Ongoing notifications to, and communication with, CSCI by the agency since the last inspection confirmed the response to any emerging welfare concerns about placed children was prompt and appropriate, with placing and area authorities being notified immediately and full co-operation being offered to ongoing investigations and strategies for keeping children safe in the interim. Of particular note was the seriousness with which the agency had followed up on informally expressed concerns about one carer household, despite a lack of timely co-operation from the placing authority concerned.

An additional safeguard was offered by the regular, at least annual, unannounced visits carried out by supervising social workers to carer households. A number of reports of these visits were seen and found to offer a useful additional perspective on the quality of care offered.

Appropriate complaints procedures were in place and information on these provided to carers, young people and placing authorities. The agency monitored complaints locally and centrally. The agency's local records indicated two complaints had been received in the last year. One of these, to do with the agency's approach to a carer, had been resolved with recognition of partial failure in the way the agency had operated its own procedures. The other complaint related to the concerns about a carer household noted above, about which the agency was in the process of finalising its investigation.

The agency had appropriate procedures in place for recruitment of staff with all required stages of recruitment and vetting being carried out in line with the expectations of regulations and standards. This was confirmed by examination of files for staff appointed since the last inspection. Some advice was offered about timescales for retention of CRB certificates, which the manager agreed to raise centrally with FCA. Staff employed by the agency were suitably qualified and experienced for the roles undertaken and in interviews displayed a good understanding of fostering issues in general and the particular areas of practice relevant to their role in the agency.

New foster carer assessments seen during this inspection were seen to cover the areas and checks required although some minor inconsistencies in presentation and detail of substantiating evidence for competencies were noted. The majority of assessments were carried out by independent assessors and the newly appointed Recruitment Manager had already identified the need

to review the consistency and presentation of assessments and timescales for completion.

The agency's foster panel was constituted in line with regulations and the chair of the panel remained unchanged since the last inspection, when she was found to be suitably qualified and experienced for that role. Although overall Panel membership was stable although some changes had taken place since the last inspection and it was good to note the recent membership of someone who had themselves been in foster care. The panel was efficiently administered and supported by a dedicated staff member within the agency. Training had been provided for the panel in the previous year on key legislative changes.

Observation of panel confirmed it operated appropriately in terms of scrutinising and challenging assessments and household reviews and relevant aspects of overall agency practice. A newly appointed recruitment manager was now taking on a valuable panel advisory and quality assurance role to ensure practice issues emerging at panel were highlighted and addressed in a formal and consistent manner by the agency.

The inspector did however note that the focus of panel discussion did sometimes veer into areas of less direct relevance to the task in hand and there was also a tendency to try to cover future matching considerations alongside consideration of approval recommendations. This added further time pressure to an already tight schedule resulting, for example, in long and evidently frustrating delays for applicants waiting to attend the panel in person. On that note it did also appear to the inspector that more consistent and effective use of applicant attendance time could be made, as long waits for some applicants culminated in quite cursory questioning and involvement once in the panel meeting itself.

# 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 and 13

The agency placed an appropriate emphasis on meeting the diversity needs of placed young people

The educational achievement of young people was well supported

(Key standard 31 was not applicable to this agency at this time)

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency had established policy procedure and guidance relating to the meeting of children's diversity needs. This was supported by training opportunities for carers on diversity issues.

Placed children's cultural ethnic and religious needs were taken into account in matching and placement planning processes and attention paid to meeting any shortfalls noted. The visit to one placement where children were transculturally placed confirmed the carer was motivated and supported by the agency in developing her skills and knowledge of the children's cultural needs and had taken steps to try to develop links with the relevant local ethnic community group resources.

Although no visits or case sampling was made in relation to placements for children with disabilities, feedback from carers indicated the agency helped ensure appropriate access to equipment and resources to ensure such children

were offered opportunities to develop their potential and experience life opportunities as fully as possible.

The agency provided very good support and guidance for carers to ensure children achieved educationally. The branch had an Education Liaison Officer with lead responsibility for ensuring children both had relevant school placements and that these were supported as fully as possible. Foster carers in interviews and questionnaires were fulsome in their praise of the liaison officer and the quality of support and advice offered. Feedback in children's questionnaires confirmed that carers helped and encouraged them in their schoolwork. Sampling of children's and carers file confirmed educational arrangements were regularly discussed as part of carer supervision and that carers fully involved themselves in liaison with schools, education planning meetings, parents evenings etc. A very good example of a carer, supported by the agency, battling to ensure accurate diagnosis of one child's learning disabilities was seen during this inspection.

Some carers did raise concerns about the growing impact of short-term and permanent exclusions and the difficulty of managing this. The agency was clear about expectations of carers to initially manage these situations, as any parent would, but had also provided, for example access to agency office accommodation for use for alternative educational input and tutorial sessions away from carer homes if needed. Sessional input and structured activity sessions were also provided by the agency's own separate resource staff team. More formal development of extended support structures to meet the educational needs of children, either temporarily or permanently excluded, were underway including consideration of using some carers' own direct skills in providing education input, as well as further development and expansion of resource worker support.

Good overall monitoring was maintained in FCA of educational engagement and achievement via branch education liaison officers. National figures for FCA provided for this inspection were good indicating that for school age children 97% of those eligible for a school place had one established as of 01/02/06.



# **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 and 11

The agency and its carers provided good support for children to maintain continuity of contact.

The agency placed an appropriate emphasis in policy and practice on consultation with young people in its care.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Feedback from young people in questionnaires and interviews confirmed that carers provided good support for ongoing contact arrangements. This was underlined by the response received from local authorities, where of the 33 responses received 27 indicated that carers worked either very or fairly well in partnership with placed children's families. Staff indicated that working in partnership and contact issues were addressed as part of preparation training and assessment.

Carers spoken with confirmed that due care was taken with the planning of contact visits so as to identify and minimise potential risks to all parties concerned. Where necessary contact visits took place away from carers' own homes supported and supervised by FCA staff if appropriate. Clear written reports of supervised contact visits were seen on some young people's files.

FCA has a well-established national framework for formal consultation with young people in its care that has been reported positively upon in past inspections of this and other branches. There was at present no established local Thames Valley forum in place although work was now being progressed on this by one of the senior social work staff. On a more individual basis

children in placement could offer their views via household reviews, care reviews and via FCA or placing authority complaints procedures. Detailed information about the former was supplied to children at the point of placement in accessible written formats and on CD ROM. Information on how to access external childcare organisations such as Childline, and also CSCI as regulator, was also provided. The inspector noted that the latter information, which gave local CSCI office contact details, was now out of date and advised that any future references to CSCI should use the national helpline number, pending clarification of arrangements after regulation of fostering services moves to OfSTED in April 2007

Feedback from children in questionnaires indicated they felt appropriately consulted about the day-to-day running of the foster carer households they lived in.

# 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 and 29

The agency worked well to ensure carers supported and guided young people into adulthood

Appropriate allowances and expenses were paid to carers

## EVIDENCE:

FCA had nationally placed recent emphasis on developing its support and training for carers on preparing young people for leaving care and to developing skills development programmes for young people. The agency is to be commended for the effort out into this area of work.

The inspector had the opportunity to speak with carers undergoing the training relating to leaving care, and they were impressed with the content and information provided. They felt it left them much better equipped to advocate on behalf of young people at that crucial stage of moving on to independence. New documentation was in place for carers to use alongside local authority social workers' Pathway plans to structure the preparation and planning for young people's leaving of care.

Alongside preparation of carers the agency was also embarked on a programme of certificated life skills training that it had developed for older young people. This provided opportunities for recognition of skills and achievements in a range of life skills, at different levels of complexity. This provided supplementary evidence of achievement both for those young people continuing in education, and those leaving school at 16.

The agency had clear established levels of allowances and expenses payment for carers. These were kept under regular review to ensure a balance of competitiveness with other providers and to ensure the adequacy of provision for the needs of young people cared for by the agency. No concerns were raised by carers about the levels of allowances and expenses and those spoken with said systems for payment worked smoothly.

# 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, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

The agency had an appropriate range of information about its services available to carers, placing authorities and young people.

Staff in management posts were appropriately qualified and experienced.

Good monitoring of the quality of the service was in place

The service and its staff were managed effectively and appropriately (Stds 5 & 16)

There were satisfactory numbers of staff in place to meet the needs of carers and young people in placement and the agency was judged to be a fair and competent employer. (Stds 17 & 18)

Staff were provided with good training and supervisory support (Stds 19 & 20)

Carers were very well supported in their role by an excellent structure of support services, training opportunities and ongoing supervision

Records for children and carers and those of a central administrative nature were maintained appropriately

The premises used by the agency were of a high general standard

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency had a detailed and accurate statement of purpose in place that met statutory requirements. Information was provided for young people via leaflets aged at different age groups and CD ROM. The overall range of information provided a good and accurate picture of services provided. Consideration would however need to be given to provision of this information in different, more accessible formats for children with disabilities.

The new branch manager had been recently assessed, through the process of registration, as appropriately qualified, experienced and skilled to carry out her role. Anecdotal feedback from staff and carers during the course of the inspection confirmed the inspector's positive view of the overall quality of management and leadership offered by the registered manager.

The agency had a variety of appropriate quality assurance structures in place. FCA had its own central Quality Assurance team providing formal feedback, policy advice and development on key practice areas, alongside formal monitoring and analysis of key statistical information and events such as notifiable incidents, child protection investigations and complaints. Within branch structure itself the registered manager monitored the general operation of the service and matters listed under the relevant schedule. Specific senior branch staff also took on quality monitoring responsibilities as part of their work role in areas such as education and placements. Of particular note was the role of the new Recruitment Manager, albeit initially on a short-term basis, in overseeing the quality and consistency of carer recruitment and assessment processes and panel operation. This is potentially a very valuable role pulling

together a range of key practice areas for scrutiny that may warrant establishment on a more permanent basis.

Mechanisms such as household reviews, children's care reviews carer forums were also good conduits for receipt of service quality information.

Discussion with staff and carers, analysis of submitted paperwork and observation of the day to day running of the agency, confirmed that the service was well-managed locally, with coherent central branch and local office managerial and decision-making structures in place that appeared well understood by staff and carers.

Day to day staff deployment appeared rational and effective and clear forward planning was in place identifying areas of future staff growth and expansion. Staff spoken with felt the level and variety of their work was well managed. Staffing numbers, taking into account both permanently employed staff and the use of independent assessors and training facilitators, appeared satisfactory to meet the current demands of the service.

Feedback from interviews were that staff felt FCA was a good and fair employer. Training and development opportunities were said by staff to be good and relevant to their role in the agency. Supervision was reported by staff spoken with to be regular and of good quality and there appeared to be ready access to advice and guidance from senior staff at all times either locally or nationally.

The agency provided an excellent support structure for carers comprising the following key elements

- Clear written guidance in handbooks
- Regular formal supervision and ready access to advice and support in and out of office hours
- Paid respite care breaks arranged with other carers
- Regular foster carers' forum and encouragement of local support groups
- Ready to professional therapeutic support and advice
- Sessional input from resource workers
- Input from the education liaison officer on educational matters
- Regular household reviews

Perhaps most key to the support of carers were the regular 'team parenting' meetings at which all aspects of agency support and input to individual child placements were drawn together and reviewed to provide an holistic structure of support and guidance. The confidence of carers in the range of support offered was reflected in interviews and in their feedback in questionnaires in which of the 29 responding 21 were satisfied or very satisfied with the support they received. No carers indicated they were not getting enough support.

Household reviews were read on files and observed presented to panel. These were thorough covering all relevant areas and provided opportunity for feedback from the agency, carers, birth children, placed children and placing authorities. The sample of files seen indicated statutory expectations in relation to regularity and management of reviews were being adhered to.

Documentation provided to the inspector indicated a comprehensive range of pre and post approval preparation and training was provided for carers including access to NVQ qualification. Some carers commented during the inspection on the difficulty of accessing the more in depth courses based at the branch HQ in Wendover. The agency was aware of this problem and looking at flexible means of training content delivery, including, where necessary, one to one delivery by senior social work staff who were trained as trainers.

The overall standard of records seen at this inspection maintained in relation to carers and placed young people was good containing all the areas of information required by regulation. Files in the Bletchley office were in the process of re-organisation, which should improve ease of access to current and key information for agency staff. Central records such as the foster carer register and those for complaints and child protection issues were satisfactorily maintained. The agency was making increasing use of electronic record-keeping and the central database holding key information on staff, carers and placed children was seen to be a very useful management and monitoring tool.

The scrutiny of records did however identify inconsistency in the updating of foster carer agreements where there had been a change of approval and the agency had not to date been notifying area authorities following household reviews or terminations in line with regulation 29(12). As these were both relatively minor matters they have been made subject to a good practice recommendation on this occasion.

The central branch and two area offices were all visited in the course of this inspection and found to be of a good standard offering good facilities and equipment for staff carers and young people to use. Records were safely and securely stored and the minor shortfalls in security noted at the last inspection in one office had now been addressed.



# 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>
<b>12</b>	3

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	4
<b>29</b>	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

## 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.	FS30	That the agency explores more effective ways to manage discussion and carer input into panel deliberations.
2.	FS9	That information for carers and children on how to contact CSCI is revised to include national contact points.
3.	FS25	That administrative systems are revised to ensure foster care agreements are updated following any change in approval.
4.	FS25	That administrative systems are revised to ensure notifications following review or termination of carer approvals are also sent to area authorities.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Aylesbury Area Office  
Cambridge House  
8 Bell Business Park  
Smeaton Close  
Aylesbury  
HP19 8JR

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

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