



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Worcestershire County Council
Fostering Service**

The Pines
Bilford Road
Worcester
WR3 8PU

16th March 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service

Address

The Pines, Bilford Road, Worcester, WR3 8PU

Local Authority Manager

Jean Pickering

Tel No:

01905 752830

Address

The Pines, Bilford Road, Worcester, WR3 8PU

Fax No:

01905 752806

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		16th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Peter Maddocks	
Name of Inspector	2	Katherine Ward	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Jean Pickering	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
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Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

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D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Worcester County Council fostering service provides a range of foster care services to children requiring short-term, long-term and permanent placements. The service operates a county wide duty system accepting referrals from social workers and will aim to provide a link with an approved foster carer. Where this is not possible the fostering service provides assistance in identifying a placement with an alternative fostering service provider. The service recruits and trains new foster carers, provides a range of training, support services and supervision to existing foster carers and approves family and friends as carers.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The inspection found the service to be adequately resourced by committed and long serving staff. The service had developed a range of good practice and had introduced some commendable initiatives, which included the revised skill based fee system for foster carers that acknowledged the range and level of need of children placed with foster carers. This had been accompanied by more explicit expectations placed upon carers in respect of training, and the supervision and support carried out by fostering social workers. The organisation of the service was dispersed across a number of locations; it was recognised that this was not a sufficiently effective, efficient and consistent deployment of resources. Plans were already underway to remedy some of these shortcomings. This included the appointment of an assistant service manager. Policies and procedures were under developed and did not support the good practice that was evident during the inspection.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	P Maddocks	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	K Ward	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	Alan Sholl	Signature	_____
Final Date	25 June 2004		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	The service manager must ensure that the statement of purpose complies fully with this standard.	To be agreed
2	3	FS1	The service manager must produce a children's guide in compliance with Regulation 3.	To be agreed
3	7 & Sch 1	FS3	The service manager must obtain a Criminal Records Bureau check on all the staff working for the service as required under Regulation 7.	To be agreed
4	42(1) Sch 7	FS4	The service manager must ensure that procedures and systems are developed to ensure full compliance with Schedule 7.	To be agreed
5	34 & Sch 6	FS6	The service manager must ensure that all foster homes are subject of a formal health and safety assessment	To be agreed
6	15(2)(c)	FS7	The service manager must ensure that children with disabilities in foster care are supplied with necessary aids and equipment.	To be agreed
7	12(1)	FS9	The service manager must ensure that policy and practice guidelines relating to child protection are produced to inform foster carer practice.	To be agreed

8	13	FS9	The service manager must provide written guidance regarding permitted and acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children.	To be agreed
9	42(1) & Sch7	FS9	The service manager must develop robust systems for collecting, analysing and monitoring data and information regarding incidents and allegations of abuse.	To be agreed
10	13 & Sch 5	FS9	The service manager must ensure that all foster carers receive a copy of the protocol relating to children missing from home.	To be agreed
11	Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000	FS14	The service manager must ensure that all qualifying children who leave care receive the appropriate services in accordance with legislation	To be agreed
12	7 & Sch 1	FS15	The service must ensure that CRB checks have been completed in respect of all staff and carers in the service. These checks must be updated at least every three years.	To be agreed
13	34 & Sch 6	FS18	The service manager must draw up and distribute a health and safety policy for foster carers	To be agreed
14	28(5)(b) & Sch 5	FS22	The service manager must ensure that a revised foster carer agreement complies with the regulations	To be agreed
15	42(1) & Sch 7	FS22	The service must introduce a system for monitoring complaints that complies with the regulations	To be agreed
16	42(1) & Sch 7	FS22	The service manager must prepare a policy and procedure describing arrangements for dealing with, managing and monitoring allegations concerning foster carers; and support arrangements to foster carers; a copy should be given to foster carers.	To be agreed
17	20 & Sch 1	FS30	A CRB check must be carried out in respect of the panel administrator to comply with Schedule 1	To be agreed

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS8	The service manager is recommended to make clearer and more specific reference to practical arrangements for children when the placement has been unable to match all issues in relation to the child's identity.
2	FS9	The service manager is recommended to provide a policy and guidelines that promote the recognition of signs of bullying and the measures to be taken to provide protection to children.
3	FS13	The service manager is recommended to review the suitability and effectiveness of arrangements for securing adequate education provision for all children placed with foster carers.
4	FS16	The service manager is recommended to review the arrangements for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers.
5	FS22	The service manager is recommended to ensure that all carers receive an unannounced visit at least annually
6	FS23	The service manager is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of its training programme for carers and assess the support needs of foster carers' children.
7	FS30	The service manager is recommended to recruit an education expert with knowledge of looked after children's needs.
8	FS30	The service manager is recommended to provide panel members with training in quality assurance, linked to a clearer specification of their tasks and responsibilities.
9	FS30	The service manager is recommended to ensure that an adequate reception area is identified to ensure applicant's confidentiality during the conduct of panel business.
10	FS10	The service manager should ensure that current practice in relation to promoting contact is supported by appropriate written guidelines
11	FS22	The service manager should ensure that all Section 47 investigations are reported to the NCSC

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B	INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS
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The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	22
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	16/03/04
Time of Inspection	08.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	165

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service had a draft statement of purpose dated December 2003. It includes most of the requirements listed in Standard 1.4 apart from providing information regarding the outcome of complaints. The service manager must ensure that the statement of purpose complies fully with this standard. Discussion with staff confirmed that they had been involved in the drafting of the statement of purpose. Once the statement of purpose is finalised, the service manager needs to ensure that it is formally approved by elected councillors. The service planned to provide a copy of the statement of purpose to staff, foster carers, and make available copies to children and their families. Work was being undertaken to produce a children's guide in consultation with young people and a launch was planned for 1st May 2004 when all looked after children placed with foster carers will be provided with a copy of the guide. All children would subsequently receive a copy of the guide at the point of commencing placement. As the children's guide was not yet available, the inspectors were not able to comment on it. The service manager must produce a children's guide in compliance with Regulation 3.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The service manager had an appropriate professional qualification and was undertaking a programme of management training. The service manager provided effective leadership, which was evidenced in the inspectors' discussions with the service manager and other staff. She demonstrated good awareness of the areas that required development in the organisation and management of the service.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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As part of the inspection four personnel files were examined; these complied with this standard. However the inspectors were made aware that it had not been the practice to undertake CRB checks on staff who had been in post prior to April 2002 and had already been police checked. The service had not undertaken CRB checks on administrative staff who had access to confidential records relating to children. The service manager must obtain a Criminal Records Bureau check on all the staff working for the service as required under Regulation 7.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service had a number of written procedures relating to the running of the service. However many of these were out of date and had not been brought together in a coherent and complete set of operational policies, procedures and guidance. This was recognised by the service manager and work had begun on writing and updating the procedures. There were inadequate arrangements for monitoring all of the items listed at Schedule 7 of the regulations. The service manager must ensure that procedures and systems are developed to ensure full compliance with Schedule 7. The inspectors found inconsistencies in the team managers' understanding of their role. The service had clear lines of accountability evidenced through job descriptions, team meetings and regular supervision. The inspectors did not see any written policy regarding declarations of possible conflict of interest.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:

4

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

1

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The service manager had a clear job description setting out the duties and responsibilities of the post. In order to ensure that the service manager was able to exercise her responsibilities effectively, an assistant service manager was to be appointed to provide dedicated oversight to the fostering service. The level of delegation, responsibility and lines of accountability were clearly defined. Clear arrangements for deputising were in place.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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As part of the inspection the inspectors visited four foster homes. All the homes were decorated and furnished in accordance with this standard. Children had their own bedroom. Although the inspectors were told that health and safety checks had recently commenced the files examined provided no evidence of this. The service manager must ensure that all foster homes are subject of a formal health and safety assessment. Foster carers pre-approval and post-approval training included health and safety issues. The service had a well established system of annual inspections of foster homes. Evidence was seen that supervising social workers checked home and car insurance. Foster carers had been informed of the impending inspection and a letter to this effect was seen.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The inspectors were told that the service aims to promote anti-discriminatory practice through recruitment literature, pre-approval training and core training modules. Although there was a revised policy statement to be included in the new handbook, the service had no guidance describing arrangements for ensuring children from minority ethnic backgrounds had access to appropriate foster care to meet their linguistic, cultural or religious requirements and needs. The inspectors were told about measures and initiatives taken by the service to recruit a greater diversity of carers. The inspectors also heard evidence of considerable effort, sensitivity and success in managing the placement of individual children with specific cultural needs. The inspectors did not have information concerning the number of children placed in trans-cultural or trans-racial placements. The inspectors were told about plans to investigate the viability of setting up a scheme involving a neighbouring council to provide a greater range of same-race placements. The service provided a number of placements for children with physical and learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. The inspectors were told of instances where the service had made arrangements for adaptations to be made to carers homes where required. The inspectors were told by one carer of difficulties they had encountered in obtaining appropriate equipment for the foster child. The service manager acknowledged there could be delays in the provision of specialist equipment. The service manager must ensure that children with disabilities in foster care are supplied with necessary aids and equipment. There was evidence that children with disabilities were provided with assistance to access a range of activities and support. The inspectors saw good evidence of foster carers helping children deal with discrimination and saw examples of work positively encouraging children's self esteem.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The importance of matching was acknowledged by staff and carers. Although the inspectors could not find guidance or procedures, staff demonstrated awareness of what was required. We found evidence of how the matching process had been completed on a pro-forma that took in to account the child's assessed needs and care plan. In some instances there could have been better detail provided particularly in relation to issues such as culture, ethnicity, religion and language. We saw evidence of long term foster care matches being presented to panel. The service manager is recommended to make clearer and more specific reference to practical arrangements for children when the placement has been unable to match all issues in relation to the child's identity. The inspectors were given evidence of the efforts made by the service to find same race placements for four children and saw evidence that in a trans-racial placement, support was given to both the foster carers and the young person in relation to language and cultural needs. The inspectors saw evidence that when it was possible, the child had an appropriate period of introduction that was well planned and involved other agencies such as schools.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

1

The inspectors saw evidence of training that had been provided to foster carers on child protection; foster carers also demonstrated awareness of child protection and safe caring principles and practice. The service acknowledged that there was no policy in relation to safe caring or written guidelines for each foster carer. The service manager must ensure that policy and practice guidelines relating to child protection are produced to inform foster carer practice. The service had clear guidance that corporal punishment is prohibited and this is included in the foster carer agreements. Carers reported that training and support provided by the service was helpful in developing strategies in managing children's behaviour. The service had not provided written guidance regarding permitted and acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children. This must be provided. The service manager must provide written guidance regarding permitted and acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children. The service manager confirmed that there was a system in place for reporting allegations of abuse by foster carers and that data was regularly collected and monitored by her. The service acknowledged there was no policy in relation to bullying but staff and carers demonstrated awareness about children's vulnerability. The service manager is recommended to provide a policy and guidelines that promote the recognition of signs of bullying and the measures to be taken to provide protection to children. Foster carers who were interviewed by the inspectors confirmed that they were provided with information about children placed with them and about their families that assisted them in providing appropriate care. The service followed the local ACPC policy and procedures. The service had a joint protocol between a number of councils and the police describing procedures to be followed in the event of a child going missing. However this was not included in the foster carers handbook. The service manager must ensure that all foster carers receive a copy of this protocol.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The service included a document on the duty of the local authority to promote contact between looked after children and their families in the policy and procedures handbook issued to staff; however the information in the foster carer handbook was inadequate and lacked detail. The service manager should ensure that current practice in relation to promoting contact is supported by appropriate written guidelines. The information the inspectors received from the training manager was that, in the assessment of foster carers, the importance of maintaining appropriate contact was emphasised and that carers were expected to facilitate such contact; evidence of post approval training on contact issues was seen. Contact arrangements were detailed in the children's records; foster carers interviewed were clear about the individual arrangements for which they were responsible and spoke positively about the value to children of promoting such contact. Contact is included in the matching needs pro-forma used by the service to place children.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The evidence obtained from examining records and interviewing and talking to foster carers indicated that foster carers had a good understanding and commitment to listening to the views and opinions of children in their care. This was especially well evidenced in the case of a child who had communication difficulties where the foster carer had undertaken training and spent time at the child's school to develop communication skills and in another instance where the foster carer had to work to overcome a language barrier. Evidence from the children's questionnaires suggested that young people knew how to raise complaints or concerns and that they are regularly consulted. Consultation on a general level was promoted through the total respect training and the use of facilitators such as the User Involvement Officer for Young People.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The inspectors were told that all children placed with foster carers were registered with a GP. The inspectors were told that there were problems in registering children with dentists in parts of the county. Training was provided for foster carers in first aid and a range of health issues. Evidence was seen that carers could access specialist health resources when required. The inspectors were told that there were problems getting access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in parts of the county. Inspectors were told that arrangements had recently been made for the appointment of a designated nurse for looked after children to the primary care and support team. The panel had access to a medical advisor who was also available to staff for advice and consultation. A conference on health promotion of looked after children was planned for June 2004. In interviews, foster carers said they were provided with information about the health needs of children in written form and contributed information to the children's reviews. The foster carers handbook contained little advice and guidance on health promotion issues such as healthy eating, alcohol and drugs, however the social services department has produced a guide to personal relationships and sexual health. Training was provided to carers on 'working with drugs and alcohol'

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The service had well developed links with the Looked After Children Education Resource (LACER) and the Primary Care and Support Team (PC&ST). This was a service provided in partnership between the LEA and social services. The team had a specific brief to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children. The team had a specific 'Go FAR' project that was aiming to improve a target group of LAC exam results through a stretch Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) target. Carers spoke positively about the support that had been given by LACER and PC&ST. Inspectors were satisfied that staff and carers within the service had a commitment to helping meet children's educational needs. The service had made good progress in implementing a programme of placing computers in foster carer households for use by children. The inspectors saw good examples of well-developed Personal Educational Plans (PEPs) on the case files examined. A training course on 'Education of Looked After Children' had been provided recently. All of the children, who were in the case sample used for the inspection, were attending education; the inspectors were informed that none of the children currently with foster carers were excluded from school. The inspectors were given examples of children who had received inadequate levels of education, including one child receiving only two hours per week of home tuition. The inspectors were told of examples of the service funding day care for children who had been excluded from school for periods of time. The service conceded there were difficulties for a minority of children. The service manager is recommended to review the suitability and effectiveness of arrangements for securing adequate education provision for all children placed with foster carers.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The inspectors did not find written requirements for foster carers in terms of preparation of young people for independence, nor was there evidence of any training provided. The inspectors were given evidence that foster carers had a clear understanding about their responsibility to promote independence. The local authority had a contract with a voluntary agency for the provision of leaving care service to young people. The service manager conceded that there had been contractual difficulties with the agency and that the staffing resources had been supplemented to overcome some of the difficulties. The inspectors were told that the agency was expected to provide individual and group preparation for young people approaching independence and that foster carers would be involved in this process. However the inspectors noted that the service seems to be limited to young people aged 17+. A personal advisor had been appointed to one young person interviewed but, although within eight months of his 18th birthday, a pathway plan had not been developed with him. The service manager must ensure that all qualifying children who leave care receive the appropriate services in accordance with legislation.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service had a staff group who were qualified and appropriately trained. The majority had worked for the service for more than five years and many for ten years or more, and in discussion staff demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of current legislation and issues relating to fostering. The service had written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff which were complied with by those staff responsible for staff recruitment. The inspectors did not find evidence of the requirement to verify written references through telephone enquiries. This must be done to meet standard 15.33. The service had only recently begun updating the former police checks with CRB checks; this process was still to be completed. The service had not undertaken CRB checks on staff employed in administrative or clerical posts. The service must ensure that CRB checks have been completed in respect of all staff and carers in the service. These checks must be updated at least every three years. The inspectors found no arrangements in place for assessing and confirming the competency of a new member of staff during an initial probationary period of employment; all staff should be subject to a formal assessment prior to the completion of the probationary period. All staff involved in completing assessments of prospective foster carers were professionally qualified. The service had access to educational and psychological specialists based within LACER and the primary care and support team.

Total number of staff of the agency:

39

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

3

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The service was organised from a number of different locations across the county. This ranged from teams based in three main population centres to a singleton post based in an area social work office alongside the adoption team. The service also provided duty services that differed in each location. The service acknowledged that this was not an efficient or effective organisation and deployment of resources. There was a clear management structure and lines of accountability. Staff were managed and monitored appropriately. There was no formal workload management system in place and therefore the inspectors were unable to establish how staff prioritised their work efficiently. The recruitment and assessment process was divided between the recruitment team (initial inquiries and pre

approval training) and the fostering teams (assessments). Evidence was seen that this arrangement had led to long delays throughout the process. The service manager is recommended to review the arrangements for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. Professional supervision is provided for social work staff. Staff undertake a wide range of training, both post qualifying and specialist courses. A range of courses was provided for carers who were expected, under the new agreement, to attend at least two courses per year. Carers did not have a training portfolio. There was adequate administrative support. The Worcester office had participated in an IT pilot for the council, which had introduced mobile lap top computer facilities for team members. The arrangements in other offices were not so well developed and we heard that one office had limited access to computers. The service aimed to send information out to prospective carers within 24 hours. Administrative arrangements for dealing with inquiries for services fell within the remit of the duty teams; in the Worcester office a new post had been created to deal more efficiently with these inquiries. Employees had contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service. Fostering social workers had a clear understanding of the children's social workers' role. Staff told inspectors that they had a staff handbook.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The service was fully staffed and the manager advised the inspectors that the staffing resources were adequate, although she thought that better organisation of the service would lead to greater efficiencies. The inspectors acknowledged this. The appointment of a deputy service manager would assist with the process. There were no agency staff in post within the service. The local authority was reviewing policies to encourage staff retention and recruitment of new staff. The service had a recruitment and training strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers. The service used the form F format for recording their assessment and had recently introduced a competency based assessment of carers. The assessments examined during the inspection contained appropriate information as detailed in standard 17.7. The inspectors noted lengthy timescales in the completion of assessments. They noted on a current assessment a 'letter of contract' that detailed the number of home visits and an indicative timescale for completion of the assessment.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>As part of the local authority, the fostering service followed sound employment practices in relation to staff and carers. The out-of-hours support to foster carers which was under review, was provided through the council's emergency duty system, There was a practice in one office of individual fostering officers providing personal home phone numbers to carers. There is a system for monthly supervisory visits to foster carers. Annual reviews were being carried out; the first annual review was presented to panel. Where reviews were not presented to panel a manager without line responsibility conducted the review. These were recorded on a dedicated pro-forma. Foster carers received a copy. There was no health and safety policy for foster carers. The service manager must draw up and distribute a health and safety policy for foster carers. There is a whistle blowing policy, but there was no copy of this in the foster carer handbook.</p>		

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The service provided a good range of training designed to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up to date on new legislation and practice development. Staff development and training needs were identified through the individual appraisal system. The training programme was reviewed and updated and reflected the needs and objectives of the fostering service. Inspectors were told that some joint training involving staff and carers was carried out. The service had a process for inducting new staff joining the service and there was a draft written procedure for this.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Staff had copies of job descriptions which detailed their roles and responsibilities and they had access to policies and procedures. Staff received regular planned supervision, which was recorded and audited. Staff received annual appraisals and attended regular staff meetings.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Although the inspectors did not find a written strategy, there was evidence throughout the inspection that staff understood what was expected of them in respect of providing supervision and support to carers. The service had clear arrangements for training, support, supervision and review of carers. The service was in the process of re-establishing support groups and setting up an out of hours support system. Although respite care was available the service manager acknowledged this service needed to be reviewed. From the foster carers meeting attended by the inspectors, from interviews with foster carers and from the response to the questionnaires, there was evidence that there was a good level of communication between the fostering worker and carers and between the fostering social worker and the child's social worker.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****1**

The service had a written foster carer agreement but this did not fully comply with all of the matters and obligations listed in schedule 5. The service manager must ensure that a revised foster carer agreement complies with the regulations. The inspectors examined the handbook which the service issued to carers. Many of the documents were out of date and had limited scope and a number of documents were not included. The inspectors were told that the service intended to replace this handbook with an externally provided publication in a loose leaf format to which Worcestershire policies and procedures would be added. The annual unannounced visits to foster carers had not been undertaken consistently throughout the service. The service is recommended to ensure that all carers receive an unannounced visit at least annually. The service had a written procedure for dealing with complaints and representations. There were two processes for receiving complaints, one of which involved the local authority's complaints officer and the other was routed directly to the service manager. Complaints are recorded and the outcome noted. The service manager acknowledged that the service needed to develop a more effective monitoring arrangement to comply with schedule 7. The service must introduce a system for monitoring complaints that complies with the regulations. The Worcestershire ACPC procedures are available to staff and provide the context within which allegations against carers are investigated. The information in the carers' handbook was inadequate and out of date. The social services staff procedures had not been updated in line with the ACPC procedures or the introduction of new regulations and legislation. Records of allegations were kept and the outcomes had been recorded but the inspectors did not find evidence of a sufficiently robust monitoring mechanism. Inspectors also noted that not all section 47 investigations had been reported to NCSC. The inspectors did not find any policy framework outlining the circumstances under which a foster carer should be removed from the register. The service had a commitment to providing independent support to foster carers during investigations. However there had been difficulties with this support due to long standing vacancy in the regional fostering networks. The service manager must prepare a policy and procedure describing arrangements for dealing with, managing and monitoring allegations concerning foster carers; and support arrangements to foster carers; a copy should be given to foster carers. The service manager should ensure that all Section 47 investigations are reported to the NCSC.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Pre-approval training includes opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers. Approval as a foster carer was contingent upon completing induction training. Where two adults were to be approved as joint carers both must complete this training. Training was given when specific needs have been identified and the inspectors were given examples of a very flexible approach to training delivery. Training had been provided for specific groups such as the men in foster care training. Training was provided in response to identified needs such as managing challenging behaviour. These training programmes produced positive comments from carers. Inspectors did not see any examples of specific training or support provided for the children of carers. Annual reviews of foster carers included details of appraisals of training and development needs of carers. The inspectors did not see a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of training. The service manager is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of its training programme for carers and assess the support needs of foster carers children.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The local authority had a draft written policy which described purpose, principles and legislative framework for case records. The service was revising the structure of foster carer records. The foster carers indicated that they were clear about why the children were in placement and the intended duration and purpose. The service provided lockable storage for carers to keep records.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Separate records were kept for staff, carers, children's complaints and allegations. There were systems to monitor the quality of records. There was some inconsistency in how individual team managers exercised oversight of the case files. Records were stored securely and there was a policy on access, which is compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998. The records were in general fit for purpose. The inspectors saw some inconsistency in the quality of recording. A great deal of contact recording and supervision was handwritten, which was difficult to read.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

327

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

310

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

337

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

24

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

37

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

72.17

Maximum £

490.96

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors visited the Worcester offices. These offices were adequate. There were efficient and robust administrative and IT systems. There were facilities for the secure retention of records, measures to safeguard IT systems and appropriate security systems. The office was an open plan layout for up to fourteen staff. The inspectors discussed some practical measures to minimise noise and general disruption. The inspectors were told by staff who work in the offices in Kidderminster and Redditch that they were not wholly suitable for their purpose. Both buildings were shared with another agency. These were not inspected.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The fostering service is part of the Worcestershire County Council and is financially viable.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Fostering Service is part of the local authority and it has clearly documented financial systems. Foster carers are advised of the annual changes in allowances. The inspectors saw a revenue monitoring report which outlined the financial position of the service.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was a written policy on foster allowances and this formed part of the foster carer agreement. This was updated annually. The service had introduced a competency based payment for skills system of allowances. This was contingent upon developing skills and attending training and foster carer team meetings.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service had clear written procedures for the conduct of the fostering panel which were in draft form. They included the decision making process when there was not consensus amongst panel members. The inspectors were told that all panel members have been subject to a CRB check but these were not inspected. These CRB checks excluded the panel administrator; a CRB check must be carried out in respect of the panel administrator to comply with Schedule 1. The panel had access to medical expertise but the medical advisor was not a member of the panel and did not attend panel meetings. The panel did not have a member with up to date knowledge and expertise in local education; the service manager is recommended to recruit an education expert with knowledge of looked after children's needs. The service had recently appointed an independent chair of the panel who recognised that there were issues that needed to be addressed. The inspectors noted that the February meeting of the panel was not quorate. The inspectors noted that the panel exercised its quality assurance function only through an examination of carer assessments and a list of annual reviews. The service manager is recommended to provide panel members with training in quality assurance, linked to a clearer specification of their tasks and responsibilities. The inspectors were told that both the chair and agency decision maker see the panel minutes. There was no evidence of a formal adoption of the minutes. The panel chair did not have access to a private area to meet with and discuss recommendations with applicants. The service manager is recommended to ensure that an adequate reception area is identified to ensure applicant's confidentiality during the conduct of panel business.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
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The fostering service were not providing short term breaks.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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There was evidence that kinship care was valued and that the service was sensitive to pre-existing family networks and relationships. Training and support needs were assessed within the mainstream arrangements for carers. The service was using the form F for recording the assessment of family carers. The service was using the same annual review format as for other approved foster carers although it was not using the competence requirements. The inspectors discussed with managers adapting the annual review form to reflect the differential between formal approved carers and kinship carers. Family and friend carers were paid the same allowances as other carers but did not receive the fee element. The questionnaires and correspondence from a family carer had indicated that this was the source of some controversy. One carer had made formal representations through the council's complaints and representation procedures.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

N/A

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The report is on the whole, an accurate reflection of the fostering service in Worcestershire. However the following observations are made in respect of Standards 9 and 22.

Standard 9 It is accepted some written policies and procedures are absent or in need of updating, but in our view that practice in relation to protecting children from abuse is robust. The inspectors noted evidence of training for foster carers in both child protection and safe caring and in managing behaviour. Systems exist for collecting and monitoring data on allegations of abuse in foster homes and such situations are dealt with thoroughly. The view of the service is that whilst there are some shortfalls, the services does protect children and young people from abuse.

Standard 22 It is accepted that the handbook is out of date, unannounced visits are not carried out consistently and that further work is required on the management of complaints and allegations. However, the report under this heading does not acknowledge that:

- Foster carers receive regular supervision from an appropriately qualified social worker.
- Carers receive practical support including out of hours support, prompt payment, insurance cover and fosters carers associate membership, respite care and access to social work support.
- Information about procedures for dealing with complaints is available.
- Information is available on dealing with allegations within the current foster career handbook.
- Independent support is made available to carers subject to allegations during the period in which the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service has been unavailable, other support has been arranged through sop purchasing arrangements.

Action taken by the NCSC in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 9th June 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I Jean Pickering of Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service (The Pines) confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these. (With the exceptions noted in provider's response)

Print Name J PICKERING
Signature J Pickering
Designation Service Manager
Date 8.6.04.

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Worcestershire County Council Fostering Service (The Pines) am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.