



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering Service

**County Hall
Loughborough Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 7QP**

Lead Inspector
Sharon Treadwell

Announced Inspection
Week of 22nd June 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering Service
Address	County Hall Loughborough Road West Bridgford Nottingham NG2 7QP
Telephone number	0115 982 3823
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Nottinghamshire County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jayne Austin
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 17th May 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Nottinghamshire County Council is the eleventh largest Shire authority in the country.

The Fostering Service is overseen by an Assistant Director with responsibilities being delegated down to a Service Head and subsequently to a Service Manager with day-to-day management responsibility.

The service consists of eight fostering teams located across five district office bases. Five of the Fostering Teams provide services to mainstream carers with the remaining three dedicated to Fostering Futures, Short Breaks and Emergency/Remand (Emergency Plus).

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose clearly defines the nature of placements provided as Mainstream, Support Care (Respite), Short Term Breaks, Emergency, Fostering Futures (contracted carers), Remand (Emergency Plus) and Child Specific/Kinship. The Short Term Break service additionally operates a sitting/befriending service to support the families of young people with disabilities. The Fostering Service additionally provides a home finding service to young people entering or moving within the care system.

The Fostering Service has two Fostering Panels, each held monthly, one on a Friday and one on a Tuesday. The two panels have different members.

At the time of this inspection Nottinghamshire County Council Fostering Service was supporting 364 approved Foster Carer Households, 305 mainstream and 59 short break and had 326 young people placed, representing 65% of the looked after population.

SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by two inspectors: Sharon Treadwell and Trisha Gibbs, with a pre-inspection visit being made to the agency on April 26th 2006.

Inspectors were based at West Bridgford House for this inspection, spending a day with the Short Breaks Team at Sutton-in-Ashfield.

For the purposes of this inspection six young people and the three foster carers (one mainstream, one Short Breaks and one Kinship Care) with whom these young people were placed were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers, placing social workers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone.

During the inspection discussions were also held with the Head of Service, Service Manager, Team Managers, the Independent Reviewing Officer, the Corporate Parenting Consultant, the Youth Services Co-ordinator, the Placements Manager, the Contracts Officer and the Foster Carer Training Co-ordinator.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 25 carers, 11 placing Social Workers and 15 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report. Comments have been received from the parent of one of the young people tracked and these reflected satisfaction with the Short Breaks service

Subsequent to the writing of this report a further 5 questionnaires were received from young people, 4 from foster carers and two from placing social workers. These contained generally positive comments, which have not been included in the report.

A letter was received from the Assistant Director of Children's Services detailing Child Protection activity during the last year. The letter confirms that no child placed with Nottinghamshire foster carers has been placed on the Child Protection Register this year.

The inspector attended the Nottinghamshire Foster Carers' Conference at Mansfield Football Club on July 1st 2006.

A Fostering Panel was observed on July 7th 2006. A number of Panel members, were spoken to by the inspector, including the Panel Chair.

Prior to the inspection the Registered Manager provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about the operation of the Fostering Service.

No requirements have been identified during this inspection but five recommendations have been made.

What the service does well:

The Fostering Service is managed at all levels by appropriately qualified and experienced personnel who evidence a commitment to ensuring positive outcomes for young people placed.

The Short Breaks Team constitutes a strong, committed multi-disciplinary team offering an excellent range of support systems for young people with disabilities.

A range of forums is provided for carers' views to be obtained and incorporated into practice. Carers feel listened to and well supported.

The Fostering Service consults well with young people, providing a good range of opportunities for them to give their views, both verbally and in writing. The Short Breaks Service has developed particularly commendable range of consultation and information forms, which are appropriate to young people with disabilities.

There are strong, positive working relationships evidenced between supervising and placing social workers.

There is good support for and recognition of young people's personal and educational achievements.

Reports for foster carer assessments and carer reviews are completed to a high standard with good evidence of foster carers' abilities to keep young people safe.

Panel members are very aware of their independence and of their role as 'the final safeguard'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Fostering Service transferred to electronic recording systems in January 2005. The 'Framework' system is very much in its developmental stage but the inspectors would note the commendable potential for this system in terms of 'Working Together' to secure positive outcomes for young people. Staff need some written guidelines in relation to this system.

The Fostering Service has extended the range of training opportunities for foster carers.

What they could do better:

A recommendation was made following the previous inspection, for the Fostering Service to ensure that appropriate information was included in the files retained in relation to panel members. This has not been implemented.

Foster carers should be provided with a written health record in respect of each child placed, which is updated during placement and moves with the child.

The Carers' Handbook should be developed to provide a better 'working tool' for carers.

The Fostering Service should ensure that it retains full evidence of matching considerations in respect of each placement made.

A recording policy should be developed for carers. Current carer recording of children's placements is inadequate.

Foster carers' supervision records should evidence that the placement is meeting each child's needs in respect of the five outcomes.

The Fostering Service should raise the profile of the Children's Rights Service with young people, carers and staff.

The Fostering Service must ensure that the Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2002.
Panel Guidance should cover decision-making where all members are not in agreement.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

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

Young people's health needs are appropriately met by carers but current recording systems for young people make it difficult to isolate information to demonstrate this.

EVIDENCE:

Written information supplied by the Service Manager prior to the inspection details that all Looked After children have a Health Care Plan. This document was not available in relation to all the young people tracked but inspectors were able to find records, in relation to all young people tracked, of annual health checks constituting a review of the Health Care Plan. The process is co-ordinated by the Lead Looked After Children's Nurse and the Manager was able to confirm improvements in compliance with the requirement for these checks to be undertaken annually, from 75% in 2004/05 to 81% in 2005/06.

The Lead Looked After Children's Nurse additionally provides training to carers on 'Fostering health in children' and foundation (pre-approval) training for all carers incorporates a Health Seminar. An annual Foster Carer's Conference is held for all carers and the focus of this event in 2005 was 'Healthy Fostering'

The inspectors particularly noted the excellent prioritisation of the health needs of young people receiving care through the Short Breaks Service. The Team includes a Paediatric Nurse and an Occupational Therapist, whose input ensures that carers are fully trained and equipped to meet specific and often complex health needs.

13 of the 15 young people returning questionnaires said that their carers always provided support and advice about being healthy: 'I get told off for

eating rubbish', 'If you don't have a balanced diet it can lead to problems in later life', 'Being healthy is very good for you'.

Carers also confirmed that the Fostering Service supported them in encouraging young people to lead a healthy life style: 'They ask us regularly about diet and health in reviews and support us in talking to teenagers about nutrition'.

Currently carers are not provided with a written health record in respect of each child placed, which is updated during placement and moves with the child.

The Carer's Handbook does not contain any guidelines detailing the Fostering Service's expectation that carers will prioritise the health needs of the young people placed nor of recording requirements in relation to health issues, particularly to the storage and administration of medication. Although the Short Break Service had developed pro-forma for recording medication administration, this was not being utilised by the Short Break carer tracked during this inspection.

Foster carer recording in relation to young people's health is minimal and Looked After Children review records examined during this inspection contained only a short general summary regarding the young person's health, for example: '... is in good health, no issues'. Current recording systems do not enable specific information, relating to the health needs of young people in placement, to be lifted from foster carer supervision records.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

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

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

Children and young people are provided with safe, caring and comfortable homes by carers who are trained and supported in their task.

The agency records do not provide good evidence of the matching process.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service is managed at all levels by appropriately qualified and experienced personnel who evidence a commitment to ensuring positive outcomes for young people placed.

There is evidence of good stability within the service with a low staff turnover rate.

Three personnel files and supervision records were examined during the inspection relating to staff employed since the previous inspection and inspectors additionally viewed the files relating to two panel members. Staff personnel files contained evidence of appropriate checks although the Fostering Service is reminded of the need to carry out telephone checks on references received.

The Fostering service has been advised that some standardisation in the organisation of personnel files would make information more easily accessible.

Panel member's files were inappropriate and contained only a signed confidentiality agreement and confirmation of Criminal Records Bureau clearance. A recommendation was made during the previous inspection detailing the information, which should be retained in relation to panel members.

The Fostering Service Manager has been reminded that panel members are employees of the service and, as such should be subject to the same statutory checks.

The Fostering Panel observed on July 7th listed eleven members, only three of who were truly independent.

Discussions were held with the Management Team and the Panel Co-ordinator during which they were advised to review current membership listings for the two panels to ascertain that compliance is evidenced with regulatory requirements, particularly in relation to independence and membership numbers.

The inspector has, since the inspection, confirmed to the Head of Service and Fostering Manager that independent members must not be employees of Nottinghamshire County Council.

The Panel Chair was experienced and competent and panel members expressed their confidence in his leadership. Carers attending panel were made to feel relaxed without compromising the formality of the process. Panel minutes provide a clear record and contain good detail of discussions held.

During observation of the panel the inspector noted that the panel required clarification regarding a particular aspect of departmental policy and were unable to access this. The Fostering Service could consider appointing a senior member of staff to operate as Panel Advisor.

The Agency Decision Maker (also the Placements Manager) was interviewed during the inspection and told inspectors that he sometimes observed the panel as part of his Quality Assurance role. The inspectors would advise that this be a very infrequent practice since it has the potential to compromise transparency.

Currently the Panel Guidance does not cover decision-making where all members are not in agreement.

The Foster Carers visited during this inspection were found to provide a good standard of care to young people in placement.

The Fostering Service has developed a commendable standard pro-forma safe care policy, which is then individualised to detail issues specific to individual placements. Alterations were made to the pro-forma as a result of consultation with young people. This is commended.

The pro-forma ensures full consideration of all areas of potential risk. Two of the safe care policies examined during the inspection were fully reflective of the individual needs of the young people currently in placement and one was in process of individualisation. The Fostering Service has been reminded of the need for safe care policies to be individualised at the time of initial placement of a young person.

Carers were noted to be very aware of their responsibilities to keep young people safe and 8 of the 24 carers returning questionnaires felt that the Fostering Service was excellent at ensuring that they were meeting young people's needs appropriately. A further nine thought the service was good at this. 14 of the 15 young people returning questionnaires felt well cared for in their foster home, 1 was unsure.

One young person commented 'Being in care is really not that bad, especially if any child or teenager has the foster carer I've got. She deserves a medal'.

A range of training opportunities is provided to carers: 'Caring for an abused child', 'Attachment and safeguarding' and 'Managing challenging behaviour'. Training and written guidelines are additionally provided for carers relating to the susceptibility of Looked After Children to bullying and one carer stated 'On a couple of occasions we have had difficulty with bullying and the support from the social worker and my support worker has been of a very high standard'. The Fostering Panel has also received training on 'How to make safe judgements'.

The Fostering Service's electronic recording system now provides them with immediate access to the recordings of young people's social workers ensuring that they are fully up to date with all issues regarding young people in placement and placing social worker contacts with birth families.

All foster homes are subject to a health and safety assessment as part of the carer assessment/approval process and this is reviewed annually as an integral part of the carer review process. The written record of the review details any changes or additional requirements in relation to health and safety.

In respect of the carers tracked the inspectors were unable to locate the original health and safety risk assessment. This is further complicated by the introduction of the Framework system, which replaces written records (which will ultimately be archived) and the inspectors have advised the Fostering Service to ensure that the original health and safety risk assessment is entered on to the Framework system to provide evidence.

All carer assessments and reviews presented to the panel observed by the inspector were completed to a commendably high standard, though the inspectors would suggest that the front page of the review report should detail the carer's current approval status. All assessments and reviews presented had Health and Safety Risk Assessments and Safe Care Policies attached as well as containing good evidence of the carers' abilities to keep young people safe.

The level of complaints received by the Fostering Service is low. Complaints are handled by the Nottinghamshire County Council Customer Services Department and files relating to four complaints were provided to the inspectors. The inspectors have suggested that the Fostering Service Manager should retain a central log of these detailing briefly the nature and progress of complaints relating to the Fostering Service.

The young people tracked during the inspection were noted to be well matched with their carers and most of the staff and carers spoken to confirmed that matching was an important consideration in the making of placements. One carer said 'Each child is well matched to their carers ensuring that we can give them the very best care'.

Four of the offices are able to receive referrals for placement and the Framework system provides duty social work staff with ready access to current vacancies and details of those carers. During the inspection the inspectors were provided with a copy of the 'Placement Referral Form' used and were shown two forms, which had been completed in relation to recent referrals. The pro- forma is commendably comprehensive and the completed forms examined were inclusive of a robust initial risk assessment and details of the carer skills required to meet the young person's individual needs. Carer skills are well evidenced through competence based assessment and progression through four skill levels.

Placement referral forms were not available in relation to a number of the young people tracked during this inspection and on those files the inspector's found little indication of matching considerations. Several placing social workers, in their questionnaire responses spoke of the lack of placement choice when seeking to place young people, and this was confirmed by Fostering Service staff and is attributable to the high level of placement requests. Limitations in terms of placement choice make the requirement to evidence matching considerations and determination of how shortfalls will be addressed, particularly crucial.

In one of the cases tracked the placement of two siblings necessitated the granting of an exemption for the carer to accommodate four children. The inspector was unable to find evidence of any matching considerations or of appropriate consultation with two young people already in placement or their social worker. The inspector was additionally unable to find any evidence to support the granting of an exemption.

The Team Manager and social workers within the Short Break Service detailed that matching, within that service, was essentially a verbal process and that the team's knowledge of its carer's skills was central to that process. The inspectors accept that the way in which the Fostering Service is organised gives Team Managers and staff in district based teams a good knowledge of their own carer's skills but there must be clear recorded evidence indicating how a foster carer will meet the individual needs of each young person placed.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7, 13, 31.

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

Young people's personal and educational achievement is strongly promoted and their specific individual needs are well provided for.

EVIDENCE:

Currently the fostering Service has only nine approved foster carer households, which are representative of ethnic minority groups, all others being white British. The Fostering Service is fully aware that this situation is not representative of the county's population and has positively targeted recruitment at Black and Asian communities in the County. Figures provided to the inspectors for April 2006 do however indicate that the proportion of placements of non white young people is also small (27 out of 223). Discussions with the Placements Manager during this inspection additionally confirmed an appropriate strategy for commissioning placements with Independent Fostering Service providers to ensure that young people's cultural needs were appropriately met, where an appropriate match is not available within the local authority Fostering Service.

At the time of this inspection 27 placements were with Independent providers, three having been very recently secured for asylum seeking children.

The Placements Manager is currently working with other members of the East Midlands Consortium of Local Authorities to develop placement strategies specifically relating to asylum seeking children. He is additionally studying

trans-racial placement strategies within the authority with a view to generating greater placement choice.

New training has been commissioned by the Fostering Service for 2006 relating specifically to asylum seeking children. Foster carers also receive training on 'Understanding and valuing difference' and 'Valuing a child's heritage'.

Fostering Service staff and Panel members have received recent training on 'The recruitment and assessment of gay and lesbian carers'.

The inspectors observed the Short Breaks Team to constitute a strong, committed multi-disciplinary team offering an excellent range of support systems for young people with disabilities. The Team has both a paediatric nurse and an occupational therapist and offers effective and individualised support packages to disabled young people and their families.

The inspectors saw some excellent pro-forma, which have been specifically designed by the Short Breaks Team to facilitate consultation with young people, often with communication difficulties.

The inspectors noted good evidence that the views of young people using these services were listened to and acted upon, for example a scheme has recently been introduced to provide for respite care to be provided in the young person's own home.

The development of the Contract Care scheme within the Short Breaks Service is also enhancing placement choice for young people with severe disabilities.

No young people placed in foster care are currently excluded from school. Where difficulties arise in relation to education support is available from the Corporate Parenting Consultant, who additionally provides training to foster carers.

The Corporate Parenting Consultant told the inspectors that, as part of the Corporate Parenting Agreement to improve the life chances of Looked After Children, there were now individuals in a number of departments, with nominated responsibilities for this group of young people making liaison much more effective.

Additionally a small team of teachers is responsible for providing educational support to Looked After Children. This support can take the form of short-term classroom support where educational placements are at risk or educational input where young people are without a school placement whilst an alternative is being sought.

The inspectors were provided with a range of documentation evidencing the pro-active work currently being undertaken by Nottinghamshire to raise the educational achievements of Looked After Children.

The Corporate Parenting Consultant is responsible for promoting the completion of Personal Education Plans for Looked After Children placed with

the Fostering Service. A survey of foster carers conducted by the Fostering Service in October 2005 indicated that 87% were happy with the support they received in respect of education for children in placement.

Carers made very positive comments about the support they received to encourage young people to 'enjoy and achieve': 'The experience that the carers have and the good support they receive via the fostering service helps the children to achieve', 'They reward achievements in education and follow up months after to check progress.' 'They actively encourage problem sharing and attend meetings at school'.

10 of the 15 young people returning questionnaires said that they always received the right help to succeed in education; the other 5 said they usually did. Young people commented: 'I have days when it's really hard but now I have ... to help me. I am being helped to read better at home', 'School is helping people my age to start to think about how they're going to build their future'.

An Annual Achievement Award ceremony is held for Looked After Children and inspectors were shown a collage, compiled by the Corporate Parenting Consultant, of photographs of young people receiving their awards at last year's ceremony.

The inspectors noted young people being given opportunities to partake in a wide range of activities. One young person visited had achieved medals for both dancing and running.

During the Foster Carers' Conference the inspector observed a range of activities being provided for fostered children and carers own children. A high level of supervision was provided, including one-to-one, where risk assessment had determined this to be necessary.

Nottinghamshire was part of the pilot for 'Taking Part', encouraging young people's involvement in out of school activities and the Youth Services Co-ordinator continues to monitor leisure activities for young people in foster care.

The files of young people tracked indicated that some of them had made considerable educational progress whilst in placement. The records currently retained by foster carers of young people's placements make it difficult to fully evidence the attainments and achievements of young people.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10, 11

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

The Fostering Service has developed a good range of consultation processes with foster carers and with young people in placement, which focus on placements appropriately meeting young peoples individual needs.

EVIDENCE:

Young people spoken to during the inspection confirmed that arrangements for contact were appropriate. Two young people particularly told the inspector how helpful it was that they were always collected for contact with a parent, by the same driver.

Foster Carers are provided with two-part training on 'Working with birth families and contact'.

The Fostering Panel were noted to be very aware of the importance of appropriate contact arrangements for young people and also of the need for carers to be supported with these arrangements.

The inspectors were particularly impressed with the strong, positive working relationships evidenced between supervising and placing social workers (the most effective seen to date), which work to facilitate good systems of communication and consistency with young people. One instance was noted where a placing social worker undertook additional visits to a foster placement to cover sickness of the supervising social worker.

The Fostering Service Team Managers indicated that relationships were helped by proximity of working, in that Fostering Service Teams are located in offices shared with Child Care Operations Teams but the joint working strategy is none the less commendable.

'Communicating with children' is deemed a core area of competence for both foster carers and Fostering Service staff and the inspectors noted a range of mechanisms for communicating with young people. A quarterly carers magazine 'Focus' includes a section for young people's comments and for circulating information to young people in foster care; Nottinghamshire County Council operates the 'Listen 4 a change' group for all Looked After Children over the age of 11 years; Written feedback forms are circulated to and discussions are held with, young people prior to their own and carer's reviews. The Short Break Service has been commended on the development of a whole range of attractively presented, child friendly consultation documents. The Fostering Service organises a number of social events involving carers, carer's children and fostered children and these are well attended by both staff and management.

In their questionnaire responses 11 out of 15 young people said that carers always listened to their opinions, with the remainder saying they were usually listened to. 10 said their social worker always listened with 2 saying they usually did. Young people made the following comments: 'We have family meals where we talk about our days', 'They always listen if I have an opinion'.

The Local Authority Youth Services Co-ordinator organises a range of events for and in consultation with, Looked After Children. A good example is the annual 'Chill Out Day', which provides the opportunity for young people to sample a range of leisure activities such as climbing and canoeing. The Youth Services Co-ordinator confirmed that all the activities included are available within the county and that carers and young people could be supported and assisted to access them regularly where appropriate.

The Nottinghamshire Children's Services Department launches a Children's Participation Strategy in August 2006, which is intended to further improve consultation with Looked After Children.

The Fostering Service is commended on its mechanisms for ensuring that carers' views are obtained and incorporated into practice. A range of forums is provided: Written consultation exercises are undertaken, for example the survey seeking views about educational support. An annual Foster Carers' Conference is held for all carers with activities organised for young people; Foster Carer support groups are in place in each area and representatives from these are part of the Foster Carer Liaison Committee, which operates countywide and has regular meetings with management; Carers are represented on the training development group, which plans training needs for the coming year.

Two sets of carer satisfaction questionnaires circulated by the Fostering Service have indicated a 96% satisfaction rate.

Both foster carer assessments and carer reviews presented to the panel attended on July 7th contained valuable contributions from carers, carers'

children and children in placement. The Panel Chair told the inspector that the panel were currently discussing carers' children being encouraged to attend first reviews to express their views.

Inspectors noted that there was some confusion amongst staff, carers and young people regarding advocacy services for children. The local authority purchases its Children's Rights Service from an external provider and made changes to this last year. The current provider of this service is the National Youth Advisory Service, which can additionally supply Independent Visitors, where appropriate.

The Fostering Service has been advised of the need to raise the profile of this service with carers, staff and young people and to incorporate details of the service in the Carer's Handbook.

One carer did however comment: 'The agency provided an advocate quickly for a teenager who was unhappy with a decision'.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

14, 29

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

Young people are supported in moving towards adulthood.

Carers are happy with the payment system.

EVIDENCE:

Carer training is provided on 'Living with Teenagers' and 'Moving on-Leaving care'. The latter course links with the transition process and with the Leaving Care Act.

Evidence was noted, in relation to one young person tracked, of support and encouragement being provided to a young person to obtain appropriate employment and to access benefits. The young person was additionally being supported to remain in the foster placement post eighteen.

The Carer's Handbook includes a breakdown of the foster carer allowance and also gives specific information regarding carers' tax and insurance liabilities. Carers raised no issues with regard to payments during this inspection.

The Fostering Service operates a Skills Level payment system for mainstream carers, with progression through the four levels being determined by the acquisition of competencies and being decided by a 'Levels Panel'.

At the Foster Carers' Conference The Head of Service clarified that during this year 40 carers have moved up within the levels scheme.

The Team Managers informed inspectors that the introduction of the levels scheme had increased carers' competence and their confidence in relation to training and the organisation of and participation in support groups.

The Fostering Service rewards carers' commitment to the fostering task by way of financial rewards and certificates acknowledging length of service. Awards were presented to foster carers during the Foster Carers' Conference attended by the inspector.

There was a presentation at the conference by the Director of Services from Fostering Network who updated carers on the progress of the National Minimum allowance.

Differential payment schemes operate in respect of other carers with contract carers being salaried.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 32.

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

The Fostering Service is efficiently and professionally managed, providing clear lines of accountability, good support to staff and good consultation with carers. Carer records of children's placements are inadequate.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose clearly details its structure and aims and objectives. There is good detail about what services are available and information is in plain language and easily understood.

A separate document clarifies the carer assessment and approval process.

Two Children's guides are available for young people under and over 11 years.

The guide for younger children is commended for its attractive and participatory format.

The Fostering Service has a clear management structure with good lines of accountability. Team Managers have strong networking systems and interviews with staff working in other areas of the authority confirmed strong working links with the Fostering Service to promote good outcomes for young people.

A comprehensive training programme is available to carers and this is extremely well presented in the form of a calendar. The Fostering Service's in-house training programme won a national award last year for its quality and presentation and for the involvement of foster carers in its design.

One carer assessment was examined during the inspection and this was completed to a good standard and was supported by an excellent portfolio compiled by the carer. The assessment process has a strong competence base, which leads appropriately into progress through the payment levels.

Other assessments and carer reviews were viewed during observation of the Fostering Panel. These were also supported by excellent portfolios completed by prospective carers.

Carers feel well supported, with 6 out of 24 rating that support as excellent in their questionnaire responses.

Carers commented: 'They keep us up to date with decisions made for children, they value our opinions and they support us emotionally when things are not going well', 'We are always kept well informed, excellent training is given, staff make us feel part of the team and appreciate our work', 'Everything is done to support the carer and the young person. You only have to ask'.

The Fostering Service provides its own out of hours service, which operates between 6pm and 10pm weekdays and between 10am and 10pm at weekends, 365 days a year. This service has strong and effective links with the Emergency Duty Team Service and can secure prioritisation of a visit, where this is appropriate.

The presentation by the Fostering Network Director of Services, at the Foster Carers' Conference detailed the expansion of their Advice and Mediation Service to carers in providing support in relation to allegations or in disputes with local authorities. Access to this service is funded for all Nottinghamshire carers.

The current Carer's Handbook was considered inadequate by the inspectors. Many areas are not included for example: Leaving Care, Consultation, Behaviour Management, Recording, General Health and Safety Guidelines, Kinship and Advocacy for young people. The inspectors have additionally suggested to the Fostering Service Manager that the handbook should be developed to constitute more of a guide to practice for carers. The Fostering Service has also been reminded that all foster carers, whatever their status, should be provided with a copy of the handbook.

Carer supervision records in relation to the carers tracked during this inspection were brief (half a page) and to a minimal agenda. The pro-forma currently used does list an agenda but the records viewed did not incorporate this. The inspectors would recommend that the carers' supervision agenda should ensure coverage of carer support needs and of the meeting of the five outcomes in respect of young people in placement.

The Fostering Service transferred to electronic recording systems in January 2005. The 'Framework' system is very much in its developmental stage but the inspectors would note the commendable potential for this system in terms of 'Working Together' to secure positive outcomes for young people and in the sharing of information to protect young people. Both placing and supervising social workers in Nottinghamshire are recording on this system. There are 'teething problems' and, during this inspection, inspectors sometimes found crucial information difficult to find since the same information was filed under different headings in the records of both young people and carers. Staff spoken to during the inspection spoke of uncertainties about where to record or file information.

The inspectors note that the Fostering Service's recording policy currently still relates to paper records and would recommend that, whilst a new policy relating to the 'Framework' system is being developed, that temporary written guidance be issued to staff to ensure that crucial information is not lost in the transfer process. Some of the Fostering Teams are developing their own guidelines but a common policy needs to be adopted. The Fostering Service additionally needs to identify the essential documents, which need to be loaded into the 'Framework' system before paper files are archived-for example the health and safety checklist.

Currently there is no recording policy for carers and no guidance in the Carer's Handbook. All the carers tracked during the inspection were recording placement information, relating to all children in placement, in one diary. In

the instance of one carer this diary doubled as a personal diary. This recording system is wholly inappropriate. The National Minimum Standards require that 'an up to date, comprehensive case record is maintained, which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of his/her life events'.

No post approval training is currently provided to foster carers in relation to recording.

The current standard of carer recording has serious implications for the availability of information relating to outcomes for young people, in particular education and health. The Youth Services Co-ordinator detailed to inspectors that she was encountering difficulties gathering statistical information about out of school activities in relation to the 'Out Of School Hours Learning' project and this is largely due to current carer recording expectations.

One Kinship placement was tracked during the inspection and the inspectors noted good support to retain a child within his family. The inspectors would note however that, in relation to the case tracked, the timescales for carer approval as detailed in the Fostering Regulations in relation to this type of placement had been greatly exceeded. The inspectors spoke with the Fostering Service Management Team about alternative options to be considered where there is unavoidable delay in carer approval in respect of kinship placements. During attendance at panel on July 7th the inspector observed the approval of the kinship carer tracked and noted, with approval, the focus of the panel on the safety of the young person and the potential support needs of the carer and that recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker strongly reflected this.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	2

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS12	Foster carers should be provided with a written health record in respect of each child placed, which is updated during placement and moves with the child. The Carers' Handbook should clearly detail the Fostering Service's expectations in relation to health care, including the storage and administration of medication.
2	FS8	The Fostering Service should ensure that it retains full evidence of matching considerations in respect of each placement made. This record should indicate any potential shortfalls in relation to the match and how these will be addressed. Where other children are already in placement consultation with these young people must be evidenced. Where placement involves the granting of an exemption the Fostering Service must adhere to its procedural guidelines.
3	FS25	The inspectors would recommend that written guidance be issued to staff in respect of the 'Framework' system to

		<p>ensure that crucial information is not lost in the transfer process from written to electronic records.</p> <p>The Fostering Service additionally needs to identify the essential documents, which need to be loaded into the 'Framework' system before paper files are archived.</p>
4	FS24	<p>The inspectors would recommend that a recording policy be developed for carers and that guidance on recording expectations be incorporated in the Carer's Handbook.</p> <p>Post approval training should be provided to foster carers in relation to recording.</p> <p>Foster carers' supervision records should evidence that the placement is meeting each child's needs in respect of the five outcomes.</p>
5	FS30	<p>The Fostering Service must ensure that the Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2002.</p> <p>Panel Guidance should cover decision-making where all members are not in agreement.</p>

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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