

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Associates - East Anglia

**Sorrell House, Claydon Business Park
Gipping Road
Great Blakenham, Ipswich
IP6 0NL**

Lead Inspector
Joe
Staines

Announced
8th August 2005

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

Reader Information	
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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	Foster Care Associates - East Anglia
Address	Sorrell House, Claydon Business Park, Gipping Road, Great Blakenham, Ipswich, IP6 0NL
Telephone number	01473 833998
Fax number	01473 834030
Email address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Foster Care Associates Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Eleanor Gillian Vanner
Type of registration	Fostering Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None

Date of last inspection 21/07/04

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates is a nationwide fostering Agency with over 40 offices spanning the United Kingdom. The Agency opened in 1994, with the Anglia branch, covering Norfolk and Suffolk registered in 2004 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The main office base is located in new premises in Claydon near Ipswich, and this is linked with two smaller 'sub' office bases, in Norfolk and Cambridge. The types of placement provided by the agency are described in the statement of purpose as long term, short term, emergency, respite, bridging and assessment. At the time of the inspection, a total of forty three approved Foster Carer households were providing foster care to a total of forty-four placements. The Anglia region of Foster Care associates provides it's own dedicated education liason officer and resource manager. The region has a post for it's own therapist, however this is currently vacant

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken by Joe Staines, Regulation Inspector, over a period of 10 working days, between 8th and 19th August 2005. During the course of the inspection, the inspector interviewed three foster carers in their homes, along with the children placed there. The inspector also attended an activity day, where interviews were undertaken with a further five foster carers, four children of foster carers, and a further three children who were placed with carers from the agency. The inspector observed one panel meeting and interviewed the majority of staff employed by the agency, including the regional director and team managers for two of the offices. Files of carers and children placed with the agency were scrutinised at the main office, along with a range of policies and procedures produced by the agency. Prior to the inspection, a survey of views was undertaken, using questionnaires, of foster children, foster carers, and placing officers. The following is a summary of some of responses to general questions about the quality of care provided by the agency

Placing Officers:

Is the child considered by you to be safe in this placement?							
Yes	11	No		No Response		Not applicable	

Would you have any concerns about placing other children with this Fostering Service?							
Yes		No	10	No Response		Not applicable	

Would you have any concerns about placing other children with these foster carer/s?							
Yes		No	10	No Response		Not applicable	

Please give your reasons:							
	No, Mr and Mrs have presented as very child focused carers.						
	All the child's needs are met in this placement						

Any further comments you wish to make on the foster homes or fostering services care of this child?	
	Child had been doing very well until about 6 weeks ago, but gone downhill since due to the child's behaviour
	I have been more than pleased with the service provided. The quality of care that receives is excellent! Liaison between FCA and .CC is very good. I would particularly comment them for the support given to this placement. This is particularly valuable as is placed at a distance from

Foster Carers:

How well do you feel supported by the Fostering Service?			
I'm very satisfied	10	Quite well	1
OK most of the time	3	Don't get enough support	
No response			

Are the Fostering Service's staff good at letting you know about things concerning your foster children?							
Yes	14	No		No Response		Not applicable	
Are you consulted about important decisions in your foster children's lives?							
Yes	14	No		No Response		Not applicable	
Do you go to reviews?							
Yes	14	No		No Response		Not applicable	
Are you listened to?							
Yes	12	No		No Response	2	Not applicable	
Has the Fostering service given you a leaflet or some other written information setting out their expectations of you as a foster carer?							

Yes	14	No		No Response		Not applicable									
Has the Fostering Service made clear what punishments are acceptable?															
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>13</td> <td>No</td> <td></td> <td>No Response</td> <td>1</td> <td>Not applicable</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>								Yes	13	No		No Response	1	Not applicable	
Yes	13	No		No Response	1	Not applicable									

Foster Children:

Sometimes young people might get so angry they have to be held to stop them hurting themselves or someone else, or doing a lot of damage.					
It this has happened in the foster home you are in now, do you think it was done properly?					
Yes	2	No		No Response /Not Applicable	10
Did you ever get hurt when this happened?					
Yes		No	2	No Response /Not Applicable	10
ASKING YOU					
Do your foster carers ask you for your opinion and ideas?					
6	Yes, they often ask me				
4	They ask me sometimes				
	They don't ask me very often				
1	No, they never ask me				
	No Response /Not Applicable				
If you do get asked, what sort of things do you get asked about?					
2	If I would like to help with the shopping				
3	Where we would like to go on holiday				
2	What I would like to do on a weekend				
2	Would I like a piece of the garden				
	How I am getting on, if I am having a good time				
2	What job I would like to do when I get older				
	Pets				
	Home Improvements				
	Other foster children				
	Whether I would like to go on some trips				
	What I would like to eat				

	Visiting people
	Bedtime baths
	Punishments
	Pocket money
	How to make me and everyone else in the household happy

What the service does well:

This inspection identified several examples where the agency exceeded the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. Particular areas where the agency does well includes the support it offers to children for whom contact with birth families and/or siblings is needed. The way the agency manages educational support, consultation with children (including children of carers), is also commended in this report. Three other standards were deemed to have been exceeded; the way in which the agency monitors it's own effectiveness, the effective leadership of the manager, and the way it supports foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has improved its recruitment practices to ensure all references are checked, and the information required in schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is held on staff files. A total of 8 carers reported that they had received training in record keeping since the recommendation made, following the last inspection. The agency now benefits from its own fostering panel, which was trained in its function, and provides good quality monitoring of assessments. The panel composition included members with a wide range of backgrounds and experience in providing, monitoring and receiving foster care.

What they could do better:

One area that the agency was still poor at addressing was the placement of children with carers, outside the terms of their approval. It was clear that decisions had been made in the best interests of children placed, but records must be made to evidence the decision making process, and carers must go back to panel as a matter of urgency to have their approval change considered by the panel. Annual reviews had not taken place in respect of all carers.

The foster carer agreement should include more specific information regarding the minimum levels of supervision carers can expect, and what training both carers are expected to attend. The agency should ensure that carers are completing the records of children in respect of health progress and monitoring. The agency should also ensure that it's own records in respect of carers, includes the correct information about terms of approval.

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.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

Prospective users of the service can be confident that the agency has sufficient measures in place to ensure that the health needs of children placed with the agency will be met. However, the minor shortfall identified in relation to the maintaining of clear health records in the foster home means that this standard is not fully met.

EVIDENCE:

Records of pre admission placement information and reviews confirmed that children placed with the agency had recorded medical histories, along with information about any specific health needs. Feedback from foster carers and children placed with the agency confirmed that routine health/dental/optician checks were arranged and carried out. The foster carers handbook provided clear advice and guidance for carers in relation to health care, promoting good health and development, and in ensuring that children receive appropriate medical health care. First Aid training was included in the training programme for Autumn 2005.

During visits to foster carers, it was noted that, on one occasion, the "health passport" document, which should be provided by the agency for carers to records the health progress of children placed with them, had not been provided, and in one case had not been used. On one occasion, the record of dental/opticians visits was in the carer's diary.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30

Evidence obtained at this inspection confirmed that the agency ensures all its employees are thoroughly checked, and have the experience and qualifications needed to run the agency. Foster Care Associates working practices, from recruitment and assessment through to supervision and annual reviews, ensured that the arrangements in Foster Carer households were safe, healthy, and nurturing. The agency has suitable matching procedures, however the fact that some placements had been made out of approval category meant that prospective service users could not be assured that the service matches children to carers appropriately. Prospective service users could be confident that the agencies policies, training, guidance and support offered to both staff and carers, ensured that children placed with the agency were protected from abuse and neglect. As stated earlier in this report, the recruitment practices of the agency were thorough and robust, ensuring that only suitable people work with children and young people. The fostering panel is well organised and effective, but should have access to medical expertise through the make up of the panel.

EVIDENCE:

The examination of staff recruitment files confirmed that the references and pre employment checks required to be carried out were all in place. The examination of foster carers assessments confirmed that suitable checks had

been undertaken, and records produced, that ensured that foster homes were safe, healthy, and nurturing

The training which prospective Foster Carers had to undertake as part of their initial assessment process, included child protection, and safe caring, and the Agency had produced policies and procedures in the Foster Carers Handbook in respect of missing children, bullying, and managing behaviour. As part of the initial assessment a health and safety audit was carried out at the Foster Carers home, which included identifying any risks and actions to be taken in that regard. When there were pets in the household, a questionnaire was completed in that regard. These assessments were revisited as part of the annual review.

After approval, there were, at minimum, monthly visits by supervising social workers, to the foster carers home.

Risk assessments were also undertaken in respect of Activities arranged by the Agency, to support children during holiday periods.

During this inspection, a total of four households were visited, and the Inspector was invited into these homes. The accommodation varied in type, style, presentation and facilities, however, the overall standard was very high, and children interviewed consistently reported that they enjoyed the environment they lived in. There were no specific concerns about health or safety aspects from any of those visits undertaken. The training records maintained by the agency confirmed that carers received training in, amongst other things, safe caring, understanding behaviour and the impact of attachment. The carer's handbook, which was seen at foster homes, included clear guidance on the vulnerability of looked after children, missing persons procedures, bullying and the vulnerability of the children of foster carers.

On a national level, the manager reported in the self-assessment form that Foster Care Associates now has a national placements co-ordinator for long-term placements, and she oversees long-term placement requests across the country in an effort to give local authorities the best choice possible and make the best match available. Foster Care Associates have a placement matching checklist, seen in carers files, which identifies the suitability of foster carers to meet the identified needs of children placed with them in relation to ethnicity, culture, language, religion, locality, education, health, disability, contact, siblings being together, child protection or safety issues, challenging/offending behaviour, composition of the household, plan for the child, views of the child, individual interests, aptitudes and abilities, concerns around being placed in household with domestic pets, practicalities such as transport, and any other safety needs.

In discussion, the placements manager for the office confirmed that they, in conjunction with the supervising social workers and office manager, liaise with

the placing authority, once an appropriate match has been found, and obtain their approval before placements are made. The majority of placements made were emergency, however, where possible, visits had been made prior to the child moving in to new carers. It was positive to note that on occasions, carers had been left without placements until suitable matches were made, confirming the agency placed priority on ensuring good matching, rather than making as many placements as possible.

With regard to ensuring that foster carers received placements only within the terms of their approval, the evidence obtained from carers files and panel meeting reports and minutes confirmed that there had been occasions where children had been placed out of the approval categories of foster carers. It was a concern that one child remained in placement, having initially been placed in February with a carer only approved for respite. It was clear from reading the records relating to this child that respite care was not being provided. The manager of the agency, and staff, were able to verbally explain the circumstances that had led to these decisions being taken, however, no formal records were produced, and it was not until August that the carer went back to panel to have their approval categories changed.

The Foster Carers Handbook outlined Core Competencies for Foster Carers. These included *"the promotion of healthy emotional, physical and sexual development, as well as health and emotional achievement"*.

Each foster carer was provided with a detailed Child Protection policy and procedures, as part of the Foster Carers Handbook. Each foster carer was provided with a detailed Child Protection policy and procedures, as part of the Foster Carers Handbook. Training on child protection was provided to every potential foster carer, and is mandatory as part of the preparation work during the assessment process, and also in subsequent years, as part of the Agency's annual training programme. There was a clear expectation that all approved foster carers would continue to attend child protection training after approval, to ensure they were updated on policy, practice and developments. Interviews with foster carers during this inspection confirmed they were knowledgeable about child protection, and they were clear about whom they needed to report to, in the event of a concern or a disclosure about or from a child in their care.

Carers were also expected to draw up their own Safe Caring Policy within their household, to demonstrate that issues associated with privacy, sexuality, confidentiality, were thought through, and that any ground rules made in that respect would be consistently applied.

The Foster Carers Handbook made specific reference to bullying, and to managing behaviour. There was also a section on use of the Sanctions, including sanctions which were not permissible as they would restrict personal liberty - for example corporal punishment, deprivation of food or drink, wearing of inappropriate clothing, or restriction or refusal of visits or communication (unless this was part of an agreed plan). Of the 13 carers who responded to the question, "Has the Fostering Service made clear what punishments are acceptable?" all 13 answered "yes", and described the permitted sanctions policy as "acceptable, flexible, sensible and appropriate". With regard to the use of computers mobile phones or the Internet, the agency had a specific policy document on this issue, giving clear guidance to carers on protection issues in this area. Foster carers who were interviewed during the course of the inspection were mindful of these issues, and on occasion had taken a variety of steps to protect children placed with them from inappropriate sites and material, accessible via the Internet or mobile phones.

The examination of staff files confirmed that all the required recruitment checks were being undertaken and recorded appropriately.

The inspection included the observation of one panel meeting and the examination of minutes of the three meetings prior to the inspection. Regulation 24 (3) (b) (ii) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 requires that *the agency appoints the "responsible individual" or at least one of its directors to Panel membership.* In Foster Care Associates (FCA) the "responsible individual" (based on FCA reading of the Regulations) is the Chief Executive and, given his role and the existence of separate regionally based FCA Fostering Panels, it would not be appropriate for him to serve as a Fostering Panel member. FCA has interpreted the Regulations as indicating that FCA Regional Directors will have to fulfil the role of the agency decision-maker in relation to Panel recommendations and also therefore cannot serve as Panel members. *FCA Assistant Directors will be appointed as panel members by way of observing this specific regulatory requirement.*

The panel was able to consider medical reports, produced by the agency's health expert, however, the manager's self-assessment form stated, "Despite numerous attempts, the panel still does not have a health representative. FCA will continue to try to identify a suitable person to fulfil this role". Panel members included an education expert, an independent foster carer, not working for the agency, and a person who was, at one time, placed in foster care.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7, 13 & 31

There was evidence at this inspection that the agency values diversity, and provides a wide range of resources to support this aspect of the work it performs. The level of educational support offered to children was particularly high, and the agency exceeds the national minimum standard in this regard. The agency manages short-term breaks for children and carers well, providing good support and information to those involved.

EVIDENCE:

Foster Care Associates had produced a number of policy documents that reflected the commitment to providing appropriate placements for children, taking into account issues of race, culture, religion, language, disability, gender and sexuality. The Foster Carers Handbook contained a section dealing with placement policy in relation to meeting the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of children and young people. This included a Statement *"FCA believes that the assessed needs of a child/young person should be paramount in all placement decisions. The needs of a child/young person in relation to racial origin, culture, religion and language will be thoroughly detailed and fully taken into account by FCA when receiving placement requests from local authorities. FCA's response will always be to try and identify a suitable match in terms of a foster family whose racial and cultural origin, religion and language is the same as that of the child/young person or where as many of these placement considerations as possible can be met"*. The matching forms seen during this inspection, which included sections on ethnic origin, culture, language and religion, evidenced this. On a national level, the agency had arranged for a black history month, accessible by children nationally at a variety of events. The composition of the local foster panel included representatives from different ethnic backgrounds.

This inspection established that a diverse range of foster carers had been approved to provide foster care within a range of different racial and ethnic origins and cultures. Consideration was also given to what would be available in terms of local appropriate community resources to meet children's needs, when the matching process was being considered.

Training for foster carers, both during the assessment and post approval stages, included input in relation to diversity, promoting equality, and helping children and young people combat discrimination.

With regard to education, since January 2005, the agency has employed an Education Liaison Officer (E.L.O.), with a background of over 23 years in mainstream education, and 5 years in specialist education for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, who is responsible for overseeing educational support to children placed with the agency. The feedback from foster carers in responses to the carers survey, and when interviewed by the inspector, was consistently positive about the impact the E.L.O had with children placed with them. Examples of the comments made were that the E.L.O was "fantastic, very positive, lots of ideas, excellent in helping with ...'s new school and has advocated". It was positive to note that at the last recorded entry on the agency database, there were no children placed with the agency who were not on the roll of a school. The E.L.O has provided some training for foster carers. Recorded examples of the work undertaken by the E.L.O since January 2005 included applying for school places, teaching children

whilst waiting for school places, setting up a rewards system for children requiring support, and attending a variety of meetings where children were experiencing problems in school. One of the children visited by the inspector proudly showed their certificate of achievement presented following some good work undertaken. The FCA handbook included a 42-page handbook specifically on education, providing information and guidance on supporting children with their education and identifying the resources available to carers with this task. A number of educational tools, such as textbooks and educational games were seen by the inspector at the head office in Claydon. Visits to foster care households included discussion about the educational arrangements for the children placed. The Inspector found that foster carers were very involved with educational support – attending parents meetings at the school, helping children with homework, and liaising with school personnel about the welfare and achievements of the children in their care.

Foster Care Associates was found to be committed to it's own policy of providing three weeks respite care – to give foster carers a break from the fostering task, and there were arrangements within the Agency for administering this scheme, to ensure that foster carers had opportunities for time off.

The details of the scheme were clearly laid out in the Foster Carers Handbook, which provided three pages of questions and answers about the scheme. Foster Care Associates also provided residential / activity/short breaks for foster carers, organised via the Resource Worker team, these breaks were highlighted as a positive aspect of the agency by many of the foster carers, both in response to the pre inspection survey and during interviews undertaken during the inspection. The agency had specific forms and communication material to ensure that respite carers had all the information required to provide continuity of care to children.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10 & 11

The outcomes for both of these standards were exceeded by the agency. Contact is well managed by the agency, and the evidence obtained at this inspection confirmed that children are consulted at all levels, from within their individual foster homes to both local and national forums.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements were discussed fully during the assessment of new Foster Carers process, albeit in general terms. The Foster Carers Handbook contained comprehensive guidance about Contact with Family and Friends, and contact was addressed in regular supervision sessions between the foster carer and supervising social worker. The Long Stratton, Cambridge and Claydon offices had a suitable space where contact with families could be facilitated. At the new office in Claydon there was a ground floor with comfortable soft furnishings and a relaxed and calming atmosphere, where contact could take place, supported by staff from the agency if necessary.

Foster carers who were interviewed understood the complexities and importance of contact, and their role in supporting and facilitating this. Children who spoke with the Inspectors also confirmed the contact arrangements with members of their family.

Files examined during the course of the inspection contained clear guidance about contact, and the arrangements that existed which were laid down by the Placing Authority. Whilst foster carers might not always agree with the contact arrangements, it was clear from discussion that they understood it's purpose and context, and did everything required of them to ensure it was facilitated. foster carers were particularly mindful of the need to ensure that fostered

children were fully supported following their return to the foster home, as contact visits could raise anxieties for the children, and a period of adjustment following their return to the foster home. In the pre inspection survey of placing officers, the 6 who responded all stated that they were satisfied with the way the agency managed contact restrictions relating to children placed. When asked, "How closely do you consider the foster carer/s works with the child's family?" 6 of 11 who responded replied "very well" and 5 said "fairly well". One of the children interviewed commented that their carers were supportive and understanding following contact, as they acknowledged that their behaviour could deteriorate following such events.

Consultation forums included regular support groups for carers, children placed in foster care, and children of foster carers. All 14 of the foster carers who responded in the pre inspection survey stated that they were consulted about important decisions in foster children's lives. 10 of the 11 children who responded replied positively to the question, "Do your foster carers ask you for your opinion and ideas?" Examples of things discussed included, "If I would like to help with the shopping, Where we would like to go on holiday, What I would like to do on a weekend, Would I like a piece of the garden, How I am getting on, if I am having a good time, What job I would like to do when I get older, Pets, Home Improvements, What I would like to eat, Visiting people, Punishments, Bedtime baths, Pocket money, other foster children, and How to make me and everyone else in the household happy".

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 29

Prospective foster carers could be confident that the agency has a good payment and expenses structure.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers were paid fortnightly, directly into bank accounts. If there were additional expenses to be reimbursed, these could be claimed every two weeks. The Foster Carers Handbook provided very explicit details about payments. The information stipulated what the foster carers allowance did and did not cover. Foster carers spoken with during the inspection were clear about how the money was made up, and what it was to be used for. None of the foster carers or the children placed with them raised any issues with the Inspectors about allowances or monies requested. Payments were made on time, and were accurate. Current payments to foster carers ranged from £51 per night to £102 per night, with an enhanced rate available if identified as required, and agreed with the placing authority. Carer's records contained evidence of bonuses paid to carers for participating in events arranged by the agency, such as training and recruitment initiatives.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares 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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 2, 4, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24 & 25

The agency provides a clear national statement of purpose, detailing the services provided, however, the local appendix, detailing the local provision should be updated to reflect the current services, before this standard could be said to be fully met. The evidence obtained at this inspection confirmed that the manager leads effectively and ensures the provision of good quality child care by carers and staff alike. Prospective service users could be confident that the staff employed by the agency were suitably qualified and experienced. The

strategy for working with and supporting carers was good quality, although some room for improvement was identified in relation to the written foster care agreements. The evidence obtained at this inspection confirmed that the quality of support actually provided to carers was consistently provided at a high level, both in terms of frequency and quality of support offered. Training for foster carers was being routinely provided in areas related to the tasks of being a foster carer. Minor shortfalls were identified in relation to the case records for children and carers, which should be improved before the relevant standards could be said to be fully met.

EVIDENCE:

On a national level, there was a Corporate Statement of Purpose and Prospectus, providing the full range of information required to meet the requirements of Standard 1, of the National Minimum Standards, and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

In addition to these documents, the local Agency had produced an Appendix to this information, which provided details of the East Anglia management structure; facts and figures about numbers of foster carers and placements; and how this branch of the Agency recruited and supported foster carers and children in placement with them. Some of the information in this document was out of date and must be updated to reflect the current situation within the agency.

In terms of information for fostered children, the agency had developed a CD ROM, which was due to be distributed to all children throughout the agency. The CD ROM was structured to be user friendly towards children of different ages, with separate programmes for over and under 8's. Currently, children receive a "File of Facts" – a colourful guide designed for children aged 8 plus, which welcomed children to the agency, and included information about what they could expect in terms of their rights and responsibilities, health, education, contact, bullying, child protection, as well as giving information about how they would be supported with pocket money and clothing, about how to make a complaint, and information about keeping safe. For younger children, the agency had a separate Guide for children and young people, which included a short story "A teddy bear goes into care", illustrating how a child had to leave the family home to live in a foster home. This Guide included illustrations, and provided answers to simple questions, as well as giving reassurances that children living in foster care would be looked after and supported.

The inspection established that each of the offices based in the East Anglia Region had a Team Manager, responsible for the day-to-day management and support arrangements, with over-arching direction and management support provided by a regional director, who was based at the Claydon site.

The inspection of recruitment files, and interviews with staff employed by the agency, confirmed that the service provided good quality staff, who were suitably qualified, experienced, and committed to support the work of the agency, and the fostering task.

The inspection confirmed that staff working within the agency offices were appropriately managed and supervised. Team Managers had relevant Social Work Qualifications, as did the supervising social workers employed by the agency to directly support the foster carers and children placed.

Information in the pre inspection material provided by the agency confirmed that the agency had offered National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4 to its managers and two members of the East Anglia management team had already begun working towards this. In addition, FCA had funded external training courses such as the Certificate in Management Studies and Diploma in Management Studies where appropriate, and has funded practice based further learning such as the Children in Transition course run by the Tavistock clinic, and the Advanced Award in Child Care. Feedback from social work staff and carers alike was consistently positive about the role of the regional director within the agency. The regional director attended several focussed sessions each year when they meet nationally, helping them to develop their business skills, as well as keeping them up to date with the latest legislative changes. The regional director was directly involved in many of the activities arranged for carers and children, and was well known by all of the carers and children spoken to as part of the inspection. There was evidence of involvement from all levels of the agency, including national directors and management staff, such as attending carers and children's support groups and undertaking some life story work with children placed with the agency. Staff interviewed as part of this inspection highlighted as one of the most positive aspects of working for the agency that they were actively encouraged to contribute towards the continuing development of the agency and its policy and practice.

A national quality assurance team, who undertake regular audits of the service, with records of the findings kept, supports the agency. A questionnaire about the service provided had been produced on a CD ROM, which was seen by the inspector. The staff responsible stated that this was due to be distributed to all children placed with the agency in the near future. Children are also enabled to contribute their views at support groups, activity days, and at national events, organised by the agency, for children placed with them. Staff interviewed during the course of this inspection were clear about lines of management responsibility and accountability. The regional director stated that they attended national meetings where quality assurance matters were discussed,

The examination of children's case records confirmed that all the information required by regulations was present. The information provided to children when placements were made included reference to accessing information held about them.

Regarding support to carers, of the 14 responses received to the pre inspection survey to the question, "How well do you feel supported by the Fostering Service?" 10 responded, "I'm very satisfied", 3 said "OK most of the time" and 1 said "Quite well". Examples of the way support was offered included; "Someone always available when needed either in person or by phone", "Regular supervision", "phone calls", "visits when required", "Support meetings to discuss issues with other carers", "education liaison for children's schooling, support worker visits regularly", "I get support on the phone", "education Liaison Worker was excellent in helping with ...s new school", "training", "resource work", "supporting social workers", "summer fun days" and, "friendly non-judgemental advice". During visits by the inspector, foster carers consistently commented on being well supported, day and night, and stated that there was always someone available to talk to, or, if necessary, to visit them at their home. This was supported by the information provided to carers, in the carers handbook, which emphasised the commitment made by the agency to support carers through the provision of an out of hours service, regular visits to carers, and attendance at important meetings. However, the foster care agreement, which forms the basis of a formal agreement between the agency and carers, only stipulates that the agency will provide "frequent" visits from the FCA social worker, and not a clear commitment to a minimum level of contact.

Nationally, the agency has established an out of hours service which covers the hours of 5pm – 9am the following morning, and every Saturday, Sunday, and all public holidays when FCA offices are closed. The out of hour's team has access to the FCA database. All of the staff on the on call team have social work experience, and experience of fostering support work.

On a national level, the agency had produced a new training programme for staff and carers based around, and directly linked to, the competencies associated with the NVQ level 3 award – children and young people. However, this was not due to be introduced until 2006. Currently the region produces its own training programme and database of courses attended. The records provided showed that, in addition to the preparation to foster course carers were provided with training in safe caring, attachment, managing behaviour, non violent crisis intervention, safeguarding children, nurturing resilience in children, and life story work. In the pre inspection survey, no carers identified training as a negative issue, the comments made about training included, "The training opportunities are very good and the support that we get from the resource workers", "They provided us with good understanding in the training sessions", "Training is available every month apart from summer hols". Two carers identified training as example of the way the agency support carers. Carers also identified the following as training undertaken whilst working for the agency. Health and Safety, Drug Abuse, First Aid, Behavioural management, Disabled children, NVQ 3, Life story work, Attachment theory, Wheelchair use, Record keeping, Foster Care Associates initial skills and assessment, Abusive children and Safeguarding children. The verbal feedback received from foster carers, along with the training records provided by the agency confirmed that, where two adults in one household are approved as joint foster carers, it was still not routine practice that both successfully complete all training in respect of the fostering role. The Foster Carer Agreement stipulated that "*For some specific post-approval training e.g. child protection, both partners will be expected to attend, even if this means attending the relevant courses separately. With other post-approval training it is accepted that, because of child care and/or work commitments, it may not always be possible for both partners to attend, although joint attendance will always be encouraged*". The National Minimum Standards state that where two members of a household are approved as foster carers, they should both complete all training.

The inspector examined a number of files during the course of the inspection, including the personnel files of employed agency staff, foster carer files, and files of children being fostered.

In respect of foster carers and children fostered, the files were held in a lever arch format, and sub divided into sections, which enabled easier retrieval of information. Recording that had been done by supervising social workers was seen to be factual and relevant, and included dates and signatures, and follow up where required.

The agency had a number of useful tools for helping children and carers produce and maintain an ongoing record of the child's life events, both prior to, and during the placement. These including the memory box, camera, photo album, health passport and the CD Rom that was due to be distributed. However, as stated previously in this report, there were instances where the health passport had either not been provided by the agency, or not filled in by the carer concerned.

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	X

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	4
11	4

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

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

yes

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
1.	8	26	The Agency must ensure that in every situation where a proposed placement with Foster Carers would be outside of those Foster Carers existing terms and conditions of approval, this is firstly referred to the Fostering Panel and a record of that decision is maintained.	19 th October 2005

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.	1	The agency should ensure the supplement to the national statement of purpose, containing local information about services provided, is update to provide an accurate reflection of the current circumstances.
2.	12 & 24	The agency should ensure that foster carers update the "health passport" provided for the purpose of recording the health progress of children placed with foster carers.
3.	25	The agency should ensure that the administrative records of carers contains accurate information about the terms of approval of carers.

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