



**Making Social Care  
Better for People**

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Foster Care NCH**

**479 Margate Road  
Broadstairs  
Kent  
CT10 2QA**

*Lead Inspector*  
Pat Gough

*Announced Inspection*  
23rd January 2007      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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	NCH
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Ms Tracey Livesey
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      20th February 2006

## Brief Description of the Service:

Fostercare NCH Broad Options is a family placement project run by a national charitable organisation and one, which operates in compliance with NCH policies that govern the service that is provided for looked after children. The office is situated in Broadstairs and supports two areas, Kent and South London. At the time of the inspection there were fifty two approved foster carers looking after forty nine children. The office, which is attached to a specialist education service run by the same organisation, has a reception area on the ground floor and first floor accommodation, which includes an open office for administrators and supervising social workers, smaller offices for management and finance staff and training and conference facilities.

The monthly fee charged to placing authorities for the placement of young people is £3064. For those young people on Remand or involved in the Criminal Justice system the monthly fee is £3748 and for Mother and baby placements the minimum fee is £3748 to a maximum of £5736. The statement of purpose is sent to placing authorities and inspection reports are made available. The children's guide is made available to the young person prior to admission.

# SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was conducted over a period of three days. A foster panel was observed in session prior to the main inspection activities. New methodology was used to determine the inspection findings and focussed on the outcomes in 'Every Child Matters'. Pre-inspection material, the 'provider quality assessment' document, the 'information about carers', the 'policy and procedures' monitoring form and the 'charges' information, all completed by the service manager, dictated the focus of the inspection. The information provided through these new formats was specific, detailed and pinpointed where evidence could be located to support statements of good practice.

The inspector visited three foster homes and was able to speak to carers and young people to ascertain their views on the competency of the agency. A number of carer and children's files were examined and supporting evidence was cross-referenced. The project manager, team manager, two supervising social workers and the finance manager were interviewed. The member of staff responsible for receipt of referrals and the organisation of carer support groups was also interviewed. The inspector was able to ascertain the views of a trainee social worker placed at the agency.

The agency has experienced, in the words of the project manager, a 'difficult year' having engaged the Broadstairs office in a restructuring exercise, which resulted in a reduction of the staff group. The agency has had to meet new challenges particularly within the Thanet and Medway area because of strategic decisions made by the local authority, which have a major impact on placements within independent fostering agencies. The agency continues to consider the impact of the changing needs of the children referred for placement and are responding positively through its collaboration with the Youth Justice Board and the Intensive Fostering project. Despite the 'difficulties', the agency has maintained a high level of service to carers and to the young people and it continues to demonstrate a commitment to enhancing the service.

Of the 15 placing officer responses received, all indicated that the care given to the children was either good or excellent and the same applied to the support given with health and education. The placing authorities indicated that there was good consultation with the children and rated the agency as good or excellent on diversity. All but one stated that there is good communication between the agency and the child's social worker.

Seven of the young people completed surveys designed to ascertain their views on a number of issues relating to the service the care they receive from their carers and the service from the agency and the placing authority.

They all stated that they get support and advice about being healthy and with their education. All were positive about how they are consulted and indicated

that they knew who to speak to if they had a problem or wanted to register a complaint. All were in agreement that they felt well cared for and none of those who responded were being bullied. There was a mixed response on the issue of getting help preparing for their future. One young person when commenting on how well he is cared for stated, 'they are the best carers I've ever had'.

On the question of support from the agency and specifically the support they get to maintain placements, the carers indicated that the agency is either good or excellent. One carer stated that prior to the placement with this agency one young person had thirty previous placements. With regard to the support with education and healthy lifestyles the comments ranged from adequate to excellent and this also applied to how the agency promoted equality and diversity. One carer commented, 'there is an absolute culture of racial, religious and sexual equality within Broad Options service'. Another carer, in reference to the matching process stated, 'A lot of time and effort goes into matching the child with the correct placement'. Two carers commented on the lack of consultation with children with one suggesting that the child, referring to the children's panel, 'feels they are not taken seriously'. A carer that was recently assessed and approved stated, 'I feel I was thoroughly inducted/evaluated and feel well supported'. Fifteen carers responded.

## **What the service does well:**

The agency is managed well by experienced personnel and they engage good management systems to support the process. The managers and the staff have, between them, considerable experience in child welfare, are well informed on child development, child care matters, and the legislation, regulation and processes governing the fostering ethic.

The agency conducts rigorous assessments on prospective foster carers using the BAAF Form F format. The comprehensive assessment reports are well presented with quality summations. Minutes of foster panel meetings and observation of a panel in session confirmed that further intense scrutiny ensures that foster carers are carefully selected.

The statement of purpose has been adapted and aligned with the outcomes of 'Every Child Matters' and the inspection process. The children's guide has been rewritten and presented by a selection of young people and some staff, demonstrating the agency's practice of consulting with children and including them purposefully in matters relating to their care. Young people commented, through the surveys and during the visits, that they are consulted and listened to.

Social work staff are all qualified, conduct assessments and may follow through in supervising the carers that they have assessed. One care commented on the value of consistency and continuity having had the same supervising social worker since being approved seven years before. The staff are enthusiastic and committed and have responded positively to new initiatives such as the 'intensive fostering' project. They provide good support to carers and this has had a consequential positive impact on the quality of care given to the young people. There is a particular focus on meeting the needs of the children and maintaining their stability.

The agency has embraced the principles of Every Child Matters and focused on the health and education needs of the young people, through supporting the carers and providing additional resources independent from, but in collaboration with, placing authorities and local services.

Whilst there was some criticism by carers that consultation with young people is not as good as it could be, the agency is striving to involve the young people, in whatever capacity to play a more prominent part in decision making and expressing their views on their provision. They are attempting to revitalise the children's panel and involved a young person, recently, in the planning and presentation of a tender to a placing authority. There are also plans to ascertain the views of young people who have left care with a view to using their foster experiences to further enhance the service.

There is a strong commitment to ensuring that young people from different ethnic backgrounds/ different cultures are provided with the necessary means, resources and advice to maintain their culture but also to integrate into their local community.

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

Links with placing authorities have been enhanced where possible and this has made a difference for some young people, either through accessing important information more quickly or advocating a change of social worker, key to promoting positive outcomes for a sensory impaired young person.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the out of hours support has been satisfactory in the past, the agency has further enhanced the service in providing practical assistance where it is deemed appropriate. The OOHS person can seek further advice where necessary from team managers before making a decision.



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

It was agreed that in most cases experienced workers assess the possible risks before arranging for the supervision of contact. There was no written evidence of a risk assessment however and the manager was advised to register the fact that such assessment had taken place prior to the commencement of the contact arrangement.

The majority of carer supervision visit reports were detailed and contained useful and relevant information. Where this had not occurred sufficiently well however, the supervising social worker or the carer could be vulnerable if a discussion on a practice issue was not recorded in sufficient detail to inform future supervision. It is recommended that the content of recording is consistent and is in accordance with the case recording guidelines.

There was also some variance in the level of detail in the carers' daily logs and it was observed that records of young people's achievements were lacking. The high level of carers' and young people's achievements, evident through discussion and in other documentation, was not adequately reflected in the daily logs. The managers are looking at ways of reducing the paper exercise for the carers through the possibility of a weekly log but increasing the quality of the content.

There was evidence of pathway plans and good work being done by carers to prepare the young people for adulthood. There was agreement that this process commences in late adolescence however with too little attention to life skills learning at an earlier stage. It was recommended that a 'life skills programme' could be produced as a guide for carers to be implemented as appropriate depending on the age and ability of the child.

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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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Scoring of Outcomes

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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.

### JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

The carers ensure the health needs of the young people are well met and the promotion of health is taken seriously. The agency however needs to ensure that health plans are produced and a better-written record of practice is kept.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

### EVIDENCE:

The foster carer manual provides adequate guidance on how the carer should monitor and promote the child's healthy development. Through discussion with the foster carers, during home visits, the inspector established that they resolutely pursued resources necessary to satisfy the health needs of the young people in placement. Whilst their practice was not always adequately reflected in the written daily logs it was however detailed in child summary reports and review documentation. It also featured in some monthly supervision notes and contact sheets. There is a monthly monitoring sheet maintained for each child, which contains details of medical, dental and optician appointments, any medication administered and a record of other health service interventions such as, CAMHS or alternative therapies. One monitoring sheet referred to the carers having a good knowledge of the young person's medical condition and that 'that they are totally on top of all medical appointments' and refers to the young person as being 'extremely active, happy and robust'.

There is a health section in each child's file, however the health related information referred to and evidenced in various other documents is not collated and copied to this section. A health and sex education workshop is

planned for February '07, which will focus on relationships, teenage pregnancy and the use of contraception. This will be delivered to young people aged twelve years and over and will also be delivered separately to their carers so that more informal discussion can occur as required. This training supports core training including first aid, safe sex for adolescents and drugs awareness. The young people indicated that they are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle through healthy eating and exercise. There was evidence of fruit being available in the homes visited and the carers spoke of the importance of a balanced diet.

# 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.

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

3,6,8,9,15,30

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The service manager and other senior staff have the appropriate qualifications and skills to effectively manage the staff in order to enable them to support the carers. Children are properly matched with carers who have the skills to meet their needs and who provide comfortable living environments for their use.

The agency's procedures for vetting prospective foster carers and the recruitment of staff are thorough and ensure that children are looked after by suitable adults. The agency has clearly outlined the procedures and guidance to enable carers to protect and promote the children's welfare.

The fostering panel performs its role effectively and demonstrates its independent role in recommending appropriate carers to care for children, according to strict criteria.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## EVIDENCE:

The agency conducts the required CRB checks and renews them on a 3 yearly cycle. There have been no changes in the management structure since the last inspection and the inspector was satisfied that all checks and references had been properly conducted. Staff files are stored securely.

Health and safety checklists are completed for each household and a copy was found on file. These are updated on an annual basis. Risk assessments are completed prior to the child's placement and the 'safe care' plans were detailed and reflected all the risk elements and considerations for the child's safety and that of the foster carer. The three homes that were visited were adequately spacious, well-furnished and on the whole provided good quality living environments for the children. The young people made positive comments to the inspector, during the visits and in the pre-inspection surveys, on their living environment and the quality of the care provided. All the children placed had their own bedroom and indicated that their personal space is respected. 'Keeping Children Safe' features in the training programme for '07 and reference is made to the relevant ECM outcomes and where it is addressed in the foster carer manual. This course is additional to the modular 'safeguarding children' course.

From the files that were sampled there was much evidence that the assessment process was rigorously followed and resulted in detailed conclusions being presented to the Panel. The Panel members, on different occasions, commented on the high quality of the assessment material and the panel chair, in discussion with the inspector, confirmed this observation. Matching considerations are clearly stated in the document and featured also, to varying degrees, in the matching process following referral and in the placement agreement. The carers that were visited confirmed that the matching process was thorough and where placements are planned that the considerations are taken into account. This was less evident in the case of emergency placements, however the carers stated that due to the consistency and continuity of supervising social workers who 'have a good knowledge of our abilities' their experience is that adequate consideration is given prior to making a placement. Matching considerations for one household related to the impact certain behaviours might have on the birth children and it was noted that this was taken into account prior to placement being made.

Regular training is provided for carers on the subject of safeguarding children, a modular course which addresses the effects of abuse on children, caring for children who have been sexually abused, receiving and reporting disclosures and importantly, recording. Other designated training such as, handling behaviour, keeping children safe and non-violent crisis intervention, support the safeguarding principles. There were some examples of the stance that carers, supported by the agency, take on the issue of bullying and of their efforts to advocate for the child in those circumstances. There is good guidance in the foster carer manual addressing managing behaviour and use of sanctions and a statement on the prohibition of corporal punishment. The

guidance also includes a flowchart outlining the actions to be taken in the event of a disclosure or observation of abuse with an emphasis on the necessity to keep accurate records. Any allegations or suspicions of abuse are rapidly addressed with immediate notifications to relevant bodies and measures taken to ensure the safety of the child. All Schedule 8 notifications are carefully logged including child abuse allegations. Regulation 42 monitoring reports give brief details of incidents and their outcomes. The young people confirmed that they felt safe with their carers and were confident that if they shared a concern it would be dealt with. The young people that completed questionnaires stated that they felt safe and secure within their placements.

Thorough assessments are conducted by qualified and experienced social workers. The assessments that were sampled examined in detail the background of prospective carers, their parenting capacity and looked at diversity issues relating to cultural awareness and support for religious observance. All the social work staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and participate in core training on 'the statutory framework', the legislation and guidance governing the service, as required. The agency currently has three trainee social workers on placement who are each supervised by a qualified social worker. One trainee was observed by her supervisor giving a presentation to the Panel and another, interviewed by the inspector, confirmed that he receives the appropriate supervision and guidance and receives qualitative feedback on his work.

A panel meeting was observed in session and the inspector was satisfied that panel membership met the requirements, the subject matter was appropriate and proceedings were conducted in a positive and professional manner. The panel membership was sufficiently representative to give considered view of the information that had been presented. The review reports were well prepared and comprehensively written, with fact separated from opinion. There was healthy debate and where there was disagreement, the panel chair ensured that all views were heard equally. The panel was perceptive in its review of the carers' qualities and background and was incisive but sensitive in acquiring the information necessary to make its recommendations. The process was rigorous and measured with sufficient time given to deliberations. There were clear indicators that whilst the panel gave due credibility and respect to the prospective carers, it considered the needs of the children to be of paramount importance.

# 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.

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

7,13

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The agency assists its foster carers in providing quality care and support for children with diverse needs. The relevant systems and processes are provided and utilised to enable carers to support children with their education and to monitor their progress. There is an impressive range of support for young people.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## EVIDENCE:

The agency actively supports the NCH statement on diversity by advocating equal rights, fair representation and the proper provision for children from different ethnic backgrounds. It promotes the celebration of festivals, the recognition of customs, the use of books and other materials and the observance of different religions. This is evidenced in file documentation and in the guidance provided for foster carers. There is also information in the children's files, which indicate that the agency is committed to securing the appropriate services for children with diverse educational and social needs. The agency is proactive in supporting foster carers' access to the necessary information and advice on cultural differences through 'working with diversity' training, carer support group meetings and monthly supervision.



Carers spoke of their successful efforts to enable a young person to access the local Mosque, purchase halal meat and other provisions and documentation in the young person's file indicated that they were welcoming towards the young person's extended family. The foster carers that were visited demonstrated a full commitment to ensuring that the children being looked after had equal access to education and health services, adequate to meet their needs. Discussions with the carers supported the view that they placed great value on developing the children's self worth and esteem and were reactive to situations that might adversely affect that process. Training on this particular developmental area is provided through the 'in touch/building self esteem' course and for those participating in the NVQ courses, in the content of the relevant modules. One young person's care plan indicated that his placement had other young people of the same culture and referred to his religious status, to associated dietary choices and to the fact that he was attending an English language school. A child summary sheet commented on the foster carer 'encouraging A to be proud of his ethnic origin'. There is guidance on what constitutes a trans-racial and trans-cultural placement and adequate guidance and training on how to assist and advocate for young people of differing ethnic backgrounds.

As stated, the agency and its carers actively promote the children's right to appropriate education resources. This was evidenced in one foster placement where both of the young people had struggled to maintain their educational placement and the carer, through persistent advocacy and much research into the most beneficial placement, eventually succeeded in securing the appropriate placements resulting in more positive outcomes for the two young people. One monthly monitoring sheet provided details of the young person's education status and referred to a PEP meeting attended by the carer, which 'went well'. A review 'consultation document', completed by the carer indicates that the school placement 'is successful' and comments on 1:1 tuition and transport arrangements. The project manager stated that where from a professional evaluation it is judged that a young person would benefit from additional 1:1 tuition in the school setting but the placing authority does not agree to support payment, the agency, in some instances, provides the necessary funding. Tuition is also provided for young people who may have been excluded for longer fixed terms and for young people who have had disrupted education through placement changes. This need for extra tuition is normally identified through the young person's review of needs or within a supervision visit and a carer's liaison with the school. The manager spoke also of the difficulty in securing school placements for young people engaged in the Intensive Fostering scheme because of its short-term nature and specific features of the contract.

# 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.

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

10,11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**.

There is guidance and support provided by the agency and carers to enable children to maintain useful contact with family members and significant others. The agency's communication systems and guidance on the importance of consultation and practice encourages and enables children and carers to express their views and preferences.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## EVIDENCE:

There is good guidance in the foster carer manual on the agency's expectations of the carer and the importance of regular communication with the child's social worker and the supervising social worker. One carer spoke confidently about how contact is supported, the impact on the child's life and how the child was enabled to make choices about the level of contact they wanted. It was clear that the carer performed a neutral role, supporting the child's links with family whilst allowing the child to make a choice. The agency has a designated worker whose role it is to coordinate contact support for carers and along with other named sessional workers can, if necessary, provide supervised contact. Whilst it is acknowledged that most placements are well established with carers who are well informed and confident with contact arrangements, the agency was advised to ensure that written risk assessments are completed prior to conducting contact for the first time and if

circumstances change it should be reviewed. Placing authorities, carers and young people all indicated that the agency provide the necessary support for contact.

There are a number of consultation formats and forums in place so that young people can express their views. Prior to the carers review of approval the young person is consulted on issues relevant to the care they receive and a written record is kept on file. Similarly, before their six monthly review the young people have the opportunity to raise issues and make their views known to their social worker, the review chair and they can participate in review discussions. The team manager stated that the agency has had some technical difficulties with the implementation of the 'viewpoint' software but is confident it can soon be put into practice. 'My turn to talk', a publication presented by the National Children's Bureau and designed to increase the opportunities for young people to 'have their say' is currently being circulated to young people. The agency is considering the purchase of a package, which incorporates a therapeutic element whereby young people are encouraged to express their 'feelings' about what is happening in their lives as opposed to giving their views on the carer or the agency. The children's panel, which had been successful in promoting consultation, (five young people from the panel contributed to the review and re-composition of the current children's guide) has lost some impetus because of lack of interest on the part of the young people. The manager has recently written to young people and to the carers in an attempt to revive the forum.

# 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**.

The agency's guidance on preparing for adulthood is implemented by the carers thus ensuring that young people have the opportunities to learn life skills and become more independent. The agency should however be more direct in its expectations of carers so that children are involved in the process from an early age. The agency's financial and payment structures are sound and make adequate provision for the carers to meet the needs of the child.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## EVIDENCE:

Some pathway plans are in place and there was evidence of the involvement of the social worker, the young person and the carer in its production. 'Skills to foster' training covers some aspects of preparation for adulthood and emphasises the importance of life skills input. The inspector spoke with some young people who stated that their carers supported them and motivated them to learn and practise life skills. The agency makes clear its expectation that carers will engage children in life skills experiential learning, in preparation for leaving care and training on the subject of leaving care and 'moving on' features in the available training. There was however insufficient evidence in the carers' daily log to support the achievements of the young people and discussions with the project manager focussed on the need for more emphasis to be attached to children learning life skills from an early age. Whilst some carers might be more aware of their role in managing this than others, it was suggested that a life skills programme might assist the process. The London team have secured work experience opportunities for a number of young

people, some of which have led to full time employment and where it has not provided a direct link to a full time job, it has provided the young person with valuable experience. Support is also given to young people moving into semi-independent living, whilst ensuring that they are also protected from exploitation.

There is a written policy on fostering allowances with a clear indication of what they are expected to cover. Discussion with the finance administrator confirmed that there is good and proven system governing payments and they are prompt. The carers confirmed that payments are made on time. Due to a change in the current finance administrator's role there are plans to incorporate those financial management tasks in a senior administrators role. The inspector was assured that this person has the necessary qualifications and will be assisted in the transition by the current post holder.

# 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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**

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

1,17,19,,22,23,24.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The agency's statement of purpose contains full information to inform potential purchasers of the service and the necessary guidance to support carers in providing quality care of the children. The manager and senior staff have the necessary experience and qualifications to manage the agency and to advise and guide staff on their support to carers, enabling carers to provide a quality service to the children.

There is a good management structure with clearly defined roles enabling staff to provide an effective professional performance in meeting the needs of carers and children. There are monitoring systems in place to ensure quality performance of the agency. Specific tasks were being delegated to those staff with particular roles. There is a good number of qualified staff and carers to meet the needs of the young people. There are policies and procedures in place to support children, carers and staff. Staff and foster carers receive good training appropriate to individual needs and the needs of the agency. Staff receive regular support, written guidance and management supervision in order to carry out their respective roles in the agency. Foster carers receive support and supervision from qualified social workers.

The agency keeps up to date records, which were being stored securely. The premises are suitable for the operation of the agency and provide a comfortable and safe working environment for the staff. The premises are insured and health and safety checks are completed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The statement of purpose was reviewed and amended in April '06 and outlines clearly the objectives of the service, highlighting the ECM outcomes and the means of achieving them. The statement details the principles of care, emphasising the importance of developing a positive identity/esteem as well as focussing on diversity issues. The children's guide is comprehensive and presented in a style, which can be readily understood by the majority of the children. Five of the children representing the views and ideas of the children placed with the service played a prominent part in the production of the guide.

The project manager, the team manager and other senior staff have the necessary qualifications and experience to manage the agency effectively. The staff that were interviewed confirmed that there is effective leadership and that they are well supported with formal and informal supervision. One of the trainee social workers currently on placement offered an example of how difficult issues were very well managed and indicated that experience that he

related to the inspector would have a profound and positive impact on his social work practice. There are clear lines of accountability within the management and staff structure and all the staff have up to date job descriptions.

During the past year the agency has experienced a restructuring process, which resulted in a reduction to the size of the team. This was largely achieved through natural wastage and it appears that the project was managed effectively and with sensitivity. Whilst the past year has been described as 'difficult' the required restructuring has not had an adverse effect on how the agency is run, how carers are supported or on the outcomes for children. The workloads for the supervising social workers are reasonable and objectives are achievable. Currently the ratio of supervising social workers to carers is 1:6 and the staff who were interviewed confirmed that administration support is good. Currently there are sufficient staff to meet the needs of the service. Whilst there are carers, in the London area, to meet the demand for placement of children from diverse ethnic backgrounds there is a lack of carers with the necessary skills to foster white British children who have complex needs and present challenging behaviour.

The agency supports the development of staff, to keep up to date with continuing practice and to increase their competence in working with carers and children. This includes sponsorship on professional courses. Staff and carers receive training together for certain areas of development. There is a range of training offered to carers ranging from the skills to foster programme and induction to NVQ courses. There is a member of staff designated to organise and manage carer support group meetings, which have a training element. Training is identified through the supervision and appraisal system. The staff also have access to the internet and the NCH intranet, giving them the opportunity to keep up to date with legislation, policy, procedures and best practice. There are weekly team meetings, which the staff confirmed are practice focussed.

Guidelines, which supplement foster care agreements, specify the level of supervision and support given to carers. There was some inconsistency in the level of detail contained in the supervision reports but on the whole they were adequately recorded. The frequency of visits varied according to need and whilst all carers are visited at least monthly in one instance a supervising social worker had visited the carers more frequently within the first month of the child's placement in order to facilitate successful beginnings following the breakdown of the previous placement due to behaviour management difficulties. The foster carer agreement contains all the necessary information detailed in Schedule 5 and the foster carer handbook provides the relevant guidance.

The agency records, which were seen, were up to date, cross referenced with each other and were being securely stored. The level of detail, contained in



telephone contact records between the agency, the carer and other agencies concerned with the placement, was impressive and provided a clear historical account of responses. The variance in the level of detail in some other records has been mentioned previously and was discussed with the manager. Some carer's recordkeeping did not adequately reflect the level of difficulty the child presented in areas such as health and education nor the level of positive intervention by the carers themselves. There is written guidance for staff to follow on record keeping, detailed in 4.3 in the foster carer manual and the need for confidentiality was expressly stated in foster carer guidelines. Appropriate security systems are in place for records held on computer and on the premises.

The premises are fit for purpose and include office areas for administration and supervising social work staff, a conference room, training facilities, with some smaller offices for management and finance administration. There is a reception area on the ground floor with a controlled security system.

# 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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	3

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

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

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

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

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

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.	FS10	The agency should ensure that a risk assessment is completed prior to supervised contact occurring.
2.	FS14	The agency should explore ways of promoting life skills learning opportunities for all young people in placement and encourage the carers to engage fully in the process, recording achievements and progress.
3.	FS22	Carer supervision visit records should have a consistent level of detail.
4.	FS24	The agency should ensure that carers follow the case recording guidance in the foster carer manual so as to accurately record developmental progress and achievements.

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