



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk

**Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX**

Lead Inspector
Anna Rogers

Announced Inspection
17th – 27th October 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Local Authority Fostering, Suffolk

Address Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX

Telephone number 01473 583000

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Suffolk County Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Hayley Phillips

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 25th October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service comes under the umbrella of Children's Services of Suffolk Social Care Services. Since the last inspection a new Head of Fostering Services has been appointed. The Assistant Director for Children's Services directly supervises the Head of Fostering Services. The Head of Fostering Services is responsible for the fostering teams of which there are three distributed across the county. A Team Manager manages each team on a day-to-day basis. The Team Managers are responsible for the supervision of the fostering social workers teams. The Head of Fostering Services supervises the Team Managers and they meet together as a group.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was undertaken over ten days. The inspection included seeking the views of placing social workers, foster carers and foster children. Twenty-eight questionnaires were received from placing social workers, 23 questionnaires from foster carers, and 14 questionnaires from foster children. Feedback from questionnaires has, where appropriate, been included in the report. Overall the response from all groups was positive.

The inspection included 8 individual visits to foster carers homes which included carers that provided short to long term care, kinship carers (family) and those that provide a respite service to children with disabilities (Link). During these visits, Inspectors had the opportunity of talking with foster carers, and also with some of the children who had been placed. A salaried carer and a remand carer were spoken with at the new 11-17 project premises based at Martlesham.

Meetings also held included with the Assistant Director, the Head of Fostering, fostering social worker teams and fostering support workers, social care fostering managers, trainers, the Looked After Children (LAC) health care team, the Educational Support Services (LACESS) and two Safeguarding Managers. A panel meeting was observed and time was spent with the fostering panel chairperson after the meeting. Two support meetings for foster carers were attended. An inspector also attended the Suffolk Foster Carers Association (SFA) meeting.

What the service does well:

The Fostering service is well managed. Fostering social workers clearly work hard and were seen to be enthusiastic, committed and positive about their role. They are qualified, experienced and provide excellent support to foster carers. Foster carers commented that the best things about the Fostering Service was "the support from my social worker if I need it and always staff at hand on the phone", "good support", "if you phone with a problem there is always someone able to help you, especially if the person you asked to speak to is unavailable", "assists children who are at risk" and "set them on a good course for their adult life".

The Link Scheme for children with Disabilities is an excellent provision and provides positive respite to parents. The Link + scheme which is for children with severe disabilities has been further enhanced with a specially adapted bungalow.

Link carers commented positively about the Link Service, "Excellent training and introduction to being a Link Carer", "very supportive and competent link social worker", "all equipment is provided, as and when needed". "The Link

service provides valuable and respite to families of children with severe disabilities”

The recruitment of general foster carers is continuing. A new Recruitment and Assessment Team will take primary responsibility for undertaking assessments of new foster carers. The creation of this team should give Fostering Social Workers more time to support to foster carers.

Promoting the health care needs of young people is seen as a priority and it is evident that the Looked After Children (LAC) Health Team are working extremely hard to ensure the health care needs of all children in the care of the local authority are identified and monitored through an effective follow up process.

The training programme for foster carers provides a good range of subject matter, which, from statistical evidence, indicates a better take up of training. Comments from foster carers have indicated that the timing and location of training does sometimes cause problems for foster carers but there is evidence that the trainers have also begun exploring ways of delivering training in other settings from the main training centre and this has included involvement at support groups. Positive comments include “training is extensive” and “I am currently doing my NVQ”.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has developed in a number of areas, which indicates a willingness to explore ways of moving forward. There is now a Head of Fostering and a Head of Adoption. Splitting these two functions has enabled the Head of Fostering to concentrate on the issues specifically related to fostering. There is evidence of a more robust monitoring of systems and recording for example all notifications under Schedule 8 are now available on a spreadsheet making it easier to ensure any follow up action is undertaken. Monitoring of exemptions to fostering Agreements has also been developed and now includes a referral to the fostering panel if the placement exceeds 28 days.

The Safeguarding Team is now in place and they are responsible for child protection strategies and reviews of Looked After Children (LAC). Two of the Safeguarding Managers undertake the role of chair of the two fostering panels held each month. This is a development from the last inspection when the Fostering Manager undertook this role and the new arrangement provides independence from the fostering service. Positive action has also been taken on the membership of the fostering panel, which now includes an education representative.

Since the last inspection a new team titled Assessment and Recruitment has been developed. This will enable fostering social workers to concentrate on the task of supporting foster carers although they will continue to complete the

assessments for kinship carers. The 11-17 Project has also been developed to provide support services for Looked After Children (LAC) and in relation to fostering will provide salaried, and remand carers for young people who are either difficult to place or have had multiple placements. A focus of this new service is to reduce the placements of young people outside of the Suffolk boundary.

The development of Kinship Carers particularly in the Ipswich area has improved the number of placements for children within their own families, which reduces the pressure on finding foster placements.

There is now a LAC Educational Support Services (LACESS) and although it has only been operating about three weeks there was evidence of the impact of the workers supporting children in school and also foster placements.

The Child and Adolescent Service (CAMHS) has been restructured. Concern was expressed at the last inspection by foster carers of the delay in accessing a therapeutic input for children being cared for which they felt did on occasions threaten the stability of the placement. Inspectors were informed that a member of the CAMHS service is available on a consultation basis to both foster carers and social workers to discuss areas of concern. Feedback about this service has been positive. Inspectors also understand that the new CAMHS teams are looking at ways of reducing the waiting time for children requiring a therapeutic input.

The staff recruitment records have greatly improved. Although all staff records are computerised the Head of Fostering has asked that paper copies of staff files are also kept up to date. Each file now contains a front sheet, which provides a checklist for quick reference of any gaps in the checks to be undertaken.

What they could do better:

Some of the requirements and recommendations identified from this inspection relate specifically to social care teams rather than the fostering service. A separate meeting has been arranged to discuss these findings and to agree a way forward.

Placing social workers need to complete the notification form, which informs the health team of children entering the LAC System as some children are being missed.

Recruitment of Black and Ethnic carers needs to remain a focus. The service has relied on Barnardos to recruit suitable carers but is now also exploring other avenues.

The fostering panel should consider including in the membership a representative from black and ethnic groups. Reports presented to the fostering panel need to be quality controlled as there were some inconsistencies in the reports presented to the panel approving foster carers.

Further work is needed on the leaving care of young people particularly in relation to their health care needs.

As noted the 11-17 Project is to provide foster placements for children and young people who because of their needs are difficult to place and/or young people who have had multiple placement breakdowns. Disruption meetings should be used to identify any potential patterns of placement breakdowns, to reduce the potential for further breakdowns.

Assessments of the salaried carers should identify what additional skills are required to care for the more difficult to place children and young people.

Record keeping by foster carers needs to be completely reviewed and should include a clear process which ensures that when a foster placement finishes records relating to the child or young person are returned to the placing social workers office.

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

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The Looked After Children (LAC) Health Team has a clear process for undertaking health care assessments on foster children. However foster children cannot be assured that the placing social worker will complete the correct referral/ notification form for the process to begin.

EVIDENCE:

Discussion with foster carers indicated a mixed response to the health needs of the children they were caring for. Positive feedback included support being given to meet the specialist needs of children, including appropriate training to help them understand the child's needs. Inspectors also heard of where children have been referred to specialists including Connect and The Child and Adolescent Service (CAMHS). This service is being developed to include a prompt access for foster carers and social workers to have a consultation with a member of the CAMHS team to discuss concerns about a child in foster care. The progress of this service will be explored further at the next inspection.

Suffolk has developed a Looked After Children (LAC) health care team. This has been a positive service and has ensured that when children come into the LAC system their health needs can be addressed. However from discussion with the Designated Doctor for Looked After Children it was clear that there is an expectation that social workers will complete the notification and consent form to enable the team to prioritise and ensure every child/young person has a health care plan.

There is an expectation that the health team are notified within 24 hours using the notification form but the Doctor indicated that the team are only being notified about 60% of the children entering the looked after system. Some of the remaining 40% is being identified by the health team from the Compass documentation (the local authority computerised recording system).

The Doctor also said that the team are not routinely being notified about placement changes. This was felt to be particularly significant for children and young people placed outside of the county boundary, as they are not receiving a service. Likewise children placed in the county from other authorities are also being missed.

The LAC health team have recently completed a survey about the service of health assessments undertaken. Overall there was a positive response to the service provided with 98% of foster carers and young people being satisfied

Discussion with The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children (LAC) health team indicated that the team would be happy to have direct contact with foster carers who wanted support but there was no evidence in the Foster Carers Handbook of the literature provided by the health team detailing this information. There was also no evidence in the training information provided to foster carers of the service available.

The Foster Carers Handbook does provide good general information on promotion of health care. Positive comments were received from foster children including "my foster carers encourage a healthy diet, exercise and looking after and encouraging personal hygiene". Comments were also received about hair and skin care for children from dual heritage backgrounds.

Some foster carers commented that they were provided with good information about the child's needs on placement but some foster carers felt that they were not always given the essential information about a child contained in the Essential Information Part 1 of the LAC documentation. Comments from questionnaires included "details about child's medical condition were not given, which caused problems" and "communication when an emergency placement is made is always poor", "during our first placement (which was an emergency) no details were given about the child, no phone calls or visits were made by social worker, and contact visits that were planned did not happen both social workers were on holiday".

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Foster children can expect that they will be cared for by foster carers who are trained and supported by members of the fostering staff. Foster children can expect to be protected by the local authorities recruitment and selection process and checks.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering manager was recruited in January 2005 and attended a fit person interview as set down in Regulation 7 of the Fostering Regulations on 11th May 2005. They are well experienced in fostering and adoption services, and hold a recognised social work qualification. The Fostering Manager is starting a management qualification in November 2005. Recruitment records relating to the manager were inspected and found to be satisfactory.

The recruitment and selection process for the fostering service has improved since the last inspection. Inspectors looked at eight recruitment files of staff appointed in posts since October 2004 and five files of staff recruited but not yet in post. Whilst the information has been computerised, paper copies have been reinstated. The Fostering Manager now undertakes a check to ensure that there are relevant references and that an up to date Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) is in place before the applicant commences in post. Inspectors were also informed that the authority is intending to undertake three yearly renewals of CRB checks. From the files inspected the following

comment is made, there is a need to ensure that the interview checklist is on file to provide evidence that any gaps in work records have been explored.

There is also a need to ensure that copies of qualifications are on record. Inspectors understand from the Fostering Manager that the original qualifications would be asked for at the interview and a copy would be taken. Applicants are asked to provide two referees, one of which should be their last employer.

The Fostering Manager confirmed that they do verify the authenticity of references by telephone, and this is recorded on the recruitment checklist. However, there was evidence on one file where the last employer had been contacted for a reference but they did not feel able to give a reference. There is need to ensure that where a reference has been requested and not given, that this is verified as to reasons why. The local authority does verify qualifications through the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

During the inspection, inspectors visited eight-foster/link carer's homes. All accommodation viewed was of a good standard and comfortable. Children's and young peoples bedrooms viewed were clean and of a good standard, each reflecting the children and young persons' choice and individuality.

The foster carers handbook contains good guidance on health and safety matters. Currently there is no specific health and safety course provided by the fostering training team, but training officers spoken to said that training sessions may be set up following the consultation of reviewed health and safety guidelines.

The health and safety checklist has been reviewed and updated, and is more comprehensive following a recommendation from the last inspection report. Inspectors understand that the county health and safety section are beginning to cascade health and safety training to fostering social workers and fostering support workers and during this inspection this training had been provided to the fostering team in the north of the county.

A training course was provided to foster carers 'caring for black children', since the last inspection. This was a one-day course and two foster carers attended. There have also been fourteen attendees on two separate Diversity and Action workshops. From discussion with trainers there has been a low take up in attendance at these courses. It is important for all foster carers to understand cultural and diversity issues.

The sample of foster carers placement agreements inspected identified the matching criteria for the children placed with them. From the sample of foster

carers visited during this inspection it was clear that the authority had not been able to match the cultural ethnicity in some cases. From discussion with the foster carers it was apparent that they were aware of the skin and hair care needs of the children but clearly there is a need to ensure other issues are addressed for example an understanding of the discrimination the children and young people may feel or their experiences of being a black child in a predominately white environment.

The strategy for the recruitment of black and ethnic minorities carers is being explored with representatives of the various groups to develop a way forward. A questionnaire has been devised and circulated to people from the black workers forum who were unable to attend a general meeting to gain views about recruitment. Members of staff from ethnic groups already employed by Suffolk Social Care (SSC) have also been asked to share their views and experiences.

The Head of Fostering Service together with the Recruitment and Assessment Team are to monitor ethnicity of applicants from initial enquiry through to appointment to ensure that any potential issues of discrimination through the recruitment process are highlighted

Fostering social workers and carers were aware of the benefits of introducing children and young people to prospective foster carers. However when an emergency placement has to be made this is not always possible. It was clear from discussions from foster carers that if a child is placed from another foster carer they are provided with some information to ease the settling in.

Training is provided to foster carers including caring for a child who has been abused. Section four of the manual for foster carers included detailed information and guidance about the arrangements for child protection. Foster carers are also provided with a copy of 'Safer Caring' provided by the Fostering Network, which includes guidance for foster carers on how to manage allegations and self-protection. The foster carer handbook also provided procedures for if a child or young person is missing.

Since the last inspection safeguarding managers have been recruited and are responsible for chairing child protection case conference and strategy meetings and these are reported to The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) under Schedule 8 of the Regulations.

A positive development since the last inspection has been a change to the chair of fostering panels. At the last inspection the fostering manager chaired the panels and has now been replaced by a Safeguard Manager, which provides independence from the direct service.

A recommendation from last year was that there be a representative from education on fostering panels has been actioned.

There are clear policies and procedures in place for the fostering panel. A fostering panel was observed and was represented by all required bodies with the exception of a representative from health. There were no representatives from ethnic minority groups, which was acknowledged by the fostering manager who confirmed that, this to be explored. The panel was observed to be business like and focussed.

There were nine members of the panel and the panel chair confirmed that the panel would not operate with less than five members. From observation the panel ran effectively and efficiently. The panel chair was observed to engage all panel members in the process. The panel provided a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for those attending.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7,13, 31

Foster children cannot be assured that their placement will take account of their cultural and ethnic background. Foster children can expect that they will be supported to achieve their educational potential. Children with specific needs are provided with opportunities for respite while remaining with their own family.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service does make some attempt to take into account the needs of children as set down in 7.2 of Standard 7 but this is restricted by the limited diversity of the carers currently recruited. The Fostering Manager confirmed that Barnado's were given the contract to recruit black carers but this contract is to be terminated at the end of the year, as they have not met expectations. The new Recruitment and Assessment Team have met with the Diversity Team and Black Workers Forum to develop a strategic way forward that overcomes 'tokenism'.

There was evidence that the needs of children with disabilities were identified and closely matched by the Link Service and includes the wishes of parents. The environment needs of children with disabilities are also identified and met. Link Plus meets the needs of children with specific needs and a specialist bungalow has been developed.

Since the last inspection a newly formed Looked After Children Educational Support Services (LACESS) has been developed. This team, which commenced

from 1st September, comprises a Head of Service, Senior Education Project Workers, Education Project Workers and an Achievement Co coordinator. The team identified three main priorities relating to Looked After Children who are at risk of exclusion, failure to meet their education targets and other looked after children whose placement stability is threatened by an education placement.

Inspectors were informed that a financial decision has been made not to appoint a Personal Education plan (PEP) Co-ordinator and it hoped that checks to ensure these are in place and relevant would be the responsibility of the LAC Reviewing officer. This needs to be monitored to ensure the targets set by the Team are not compromised by the decision.

The Achievement Co-ordinator has been instrumental in developing Bright Ideas, which consists of educational toys in a bag and are available to foster carers. These are located in the three fostering service offices. Children at the age of five receive a book token and welcome packs to the library. This years project is "The Letterbox Club" which is linked to Key Stage 2 reading and numeracy. Each child is tested before they receive the educational parcels. They then receive six parcels (sent monthly), which contains stationary, library items, a reading book and an educational game. At the end of the six-month period they are re tested.

Through discussion with foster carers and the Looked After Children Educational Support Services (LACESS) it is evident that children's educational placements have benefited from the support offered to them by individual members of the team.

The LACESS team operate on a six-week intervention programme but because of the other initiatives children are aware of their existence and therefore more likely to engage. Visits to Foster Carers households also evidenced that children are provided with facilities to study including, in some cases, use of a computer provided by LACESS.

There was evidence that foster carers ensure the provision of school uniforms and equipment. Suffolk Social Care will fund a school trip for each child once every three years.

The fostering service offers an excellent and much valued preventative service (known as Link) to children with specific needs to have respite care. In each of the three fostering teams there are Link workers who provide the support to Link Carers. Discussion with Link Social Workers confirmed that prospective link carers are subject to a similar assessment process as foster carers.

Link workers said that they do not have to place children in emergencies, which enables clearer matching and time for introductions. The birth parents

are consulted about the placements and are very involved in on-going decisions.

It was evident from the last inspection that the fostering service is committed to increasing the availability of Link Plus carers who are contracted to care for the more difficult to place children with complex disability needs. The Link Plus Carers have specialist experience. Since the last inspection a newly built and specially equipped five-bedroom bungalow has been provided in partnership between Suffolk Social Care Link Service and Orwell Housing Association. It is hoped that further specially equipped accommodation will be provided.

Discussion with Link Carers confirmed their commitment to the service and said they have made friends with the children's family. Support groups are in place, which provide opportunities for discussion. A concern was expressed about the on going care of children with a disability once they reach adulthood as there is no adult link provision in place which in some situations could threaten the stability of the family placement.

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10,11

Children and young people can expect that contact with their families will be discussed and that they will be consulted.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers are provided with guidance in the form of leaflets covering contact and working with parents. The responsibility for agreeing contact lies with the placing social worker who should co-ordinate the arrangements. Evidence from questionnaires indicates that the arrangements for contact vary from placement to placement and includes contact at the foster home, foster carers taking the child to a local family centre or the parents collecting the child from the foster home. There was also evidence in questionnaires and in discussion with foster carers that foster carers send photos and letters to the parents and facilitate phone calls.

Discussion with foster children confirmed satisfaction with contact and in particular one foster child who was placed locally to their own family confirmed they were able to maintain regular contact with family and friends and continued attendance at their known school. A foster carer spoke positively about the contact arrangements for the young person they were caring for and felt that the contact was collaborative and has given the young person an opportunity to establish positive links with their parents.

Information from the Children's Rights Officers (CRO) indicates that 5 young people complained about contact with their families. However the evidence suggests that the majority of these have been resolved.

Foster carers can attend a training course titled 'Making Contact Work'. Five carers have attended one course since the last inspection. Contact is also discussed during the child's Looked After Children (LAC) review when children, foster carers and parents can express their views.

Comment was made following the last inspection about foster carers feeding back the outcome of contact to placing social workers to ensure that any difficulties are identified and monitored. At this inspection inspectors were informed of situations where there had been changes in the contact arrangements and the foster carers had not been informed.

In one instance there was a change of the known person who was to collect the child and as a result the foster carer refused to let the foster child go. In another instance the foster carers phone number was given without permission to the parents of the foster child, which resulted in abusive calls to the foster carers. Standard 10 (10.9) recommends that the outcome of contact and impact for the child is recorded and passed to the placing social worker.

Foster carers records seen during this inspection were very variable. Further comment about this is made in the management section of this report.

The guidance for The Looked After Children (LAC) reviews states that the review is the child's meeting and they should be consulted about where they would like the review to be held and who they would like to attend but this was not confirmed in discussion with carers or foster children.

Inspectors did hear that reviews were regular and that foster children and carers were generally consulted during the process. However there were a minority of negative comments about children's experiences during reviews. For example one social worker was reported to have told a young person in a review 'I have not got time, I have spent enough time with you'. The reviewing officer and foster carer challenged this negative comment and a commitment was made for regular visits to be re-instated and an apology by the social worker although this was not recorded in the review minutes.

Foster children wishing to express their views or make a complaint have access to The Children's Rights Officers employed by the local authority. Information provided indicates that while children have not complained about actual placements they have commented about being moved from one placement to another, not knowing if they were going to stay in a placement and indicating these decisions were financial.

Children also have access to National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). There is also information titled "Speak Up" which tells children and young people in

residential care, foster care and residential schools how they can make a complaint. However the details at the back of the booklet only mentions how children in residential settings or schools can contact The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).

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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

14, 29

Foster carers can expect to receive financial support in line with National agreements.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority has a policy and procedure for leaving care that has been produced in conjunction with education, local housing authorities, Connexions and the voluntary sector.

The Looked After Children (LAC) Health Team has identified a gap in the health provision of young people leaving care. Two Specialist Nurses have undertaken some research into the needs of young people leaving care and together with The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children health team have produced a report that is to be considered by LAC strategy group.

Discussion with a foster carer indicated that they felt there were inconsistencies in provision for young people leaving care while another foster carer felt there had been good planning and support to enable the young person to undertake an apprenticeship and be provided with suitable accommodation. Inspectors also heard of where young people who are attending University are receiving appropriate support.

Payments to Foster carers are in line with the national agreement. There is a clear system for foster carers to receive the boarding out payments and

expenses for each child placed with them. Foster carers felt that they were also provided with the necessary equipment to care for babies and children with disabilities but there was an occasional “blip” when children were placed in an emergency and require all the necessary basics. The Foster Carers Manual details how foster carers can access allowances and expenses.

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 carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 32

Foster children and foster carers can expect to receive a positive service that is well managed. Foster children cannot be assured that records relating to their care will be available.

EVIDENCE:

At this years inspection there was evidence that a new recruitment and assessment team has been developed, and will commence its function in November 2005. This new team will undertake assessments of potential foster carers with the exception of Kinship carers, who will continue to be assessed by fostering social workers. The assessments of the salaried carers were inspected and it was not possible to determine what additional criteria are identified for this group of workers.

Currently there are three foster teams headed by a social care manager, which covers the county. There was evidence that vacancies are being advertised and recruited. Where vacancies have arisen there was evidence that existing members of the team have undertaken additional duties to support foster carers.

Suffolk fostering service has a clear recruitment publicity strategy for 2006/2006 with a principle aim to increase overall the numbers of foster carers and to increase the number of placements for older children and to recruit carers from black and ethnic minority groups.

Statistical evidence indicates that the number of enquiries received between September 2004 and September 2005 has more than doubled from the previous year. Which indicates that the recruitment drive to increase foster carers has been successful. The number of potential foster carers attending information sessions has increased from fifty-seven in 2004 to seventy eight to date in 2005. At the time of this inspection it was not clear how many of these had completed the assessment process. As already noted in the section Staying Safe of this report the fostering service is exploring other ways of recruiting from the black and ethnic minority groups, as the contract with Barnado's has not been successful.

Assessments are undertaken using the standard F form and from inspection of foster carers files there was evidence that the assessments had been completed. The qualities, competencies and aptitudes as set down in standard 17.7 are covered during the assessment. There was also evidence of appropriate checks being taken up. Generally foster carers commented positively on the assessment process, although some commented on how long the assessment process took. However the records seen by the inspectors indicated that the majority of assessments had taken place in the required time, and where they had not, a satisfactory explanation was recorded.

Foster carers spoken to confirmed that they had regular supervision meetings with their fostering social worker. Although one foster carer was unaware what the term supervision meant, they said they had regular contact and support from their fostering social worker.

All foster carers spoken to provided positive comments regarding the support they received from their fostering social worker and support worker. Foster carers records viewed did not provide consistent evidence of regular supervision documentation, although records showed that frequent contact had taken place.

Foster carers spoken to stated that they are provided with the opportunity of attending regular support meetings with other foster carers. Observation of a foster carer support group and kinship support group confirmed this.

Following panel approval there was evidence that foster carers are subject to an annual review and a review report made available. The foster care agreements seen showed the terms of the foster parents approval including the number and ages of the children to be cared for.

It was evident from discussion that there are situations where an exemption to the approval is made, the majority of these were within the age range but the total numbers were extended. Since the last inspection all exemptions to the original approval are in the first instance approved by the Head of Fostering and if the child is still in placement after twenty-eight days this is then taken back to the fostering panel for agreement. Since the last inspection the foster care agreement has been amended to meet Schedule 5 requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The fostering service supports a local Foster Care Association, which is chaired and attended by foster carers. The Foster Care Association arranges an annual Foster Care Association conference and this year was held in October 2005 with a number of workshops and speakers arranged. The fostering teams supported this conference. There was evidence that the Head of Fostering has engaged the support of the Foster Care Association in specific pieces of development and they are asked to comment on policies and procedures that are relevant to the fostering service.

Since the last inspection the fostering service has improved in terms of informing CSCI of events and notifications listed under Schedule 8 of the fostering service regulations 2002.

Staff from the Fostering training services were spoken to during the inspection and they confirmed that there is a clear programme of training available for foster carers which takes place prior to approval, following approval and ongoing. Documentation was provided which evidenced a good training programme, which informs the foster carers of issues around their work role. Foster carers are provided with the opportunity to complete a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 Caring for Children and Young People or a BTEC qualification.

Foster carers spoken with stated that there is sufficient training available to meet their needs. Some foster carers expressed satisfaction with the training opportunities they had been provided with including specialist training which helped to understand the specific needs of children in their care. However there was a minority view raised about how comments on evaluations were taken forward. Foster carers raised concerns that their enthusiasm on training courses had been undermined by others who did not wish to attend courses and diverted from the aims and objectives of courses.

As noted in section Staying Safe of this report further development of issues of culture and diversity should be considered to be provided in all training courses for foster carers, as statistical evidence provided shows that the specific course listed has a low take up of attendance.

There was evidence that existing foster carers contribute to training and this was viewed as positive by foster carers receiving training. A number of existing foster carers have been identified as Mentors for new foster carers but this scheme seems to have lapsed.

An event had been arranged for Children who Foster in July 2005, which provided an opportunity for staff to discuss child protection issues as well as having a "Fun Day". This event was attended by approximately 16 children aged 11 to 16 years old and was felt to be positive. Inspectors understand that further events are to be planned in conjunction with the Children who Foster.

All records seen relating to the fostering service were found to be stored appropriately. Records relating to children in foster care were generally seen to be satisfactory. Placing social workers use the local authority's recording system (Compass) to record the contact with the children. Foster children are supported to reflect on their history. Inspectors were shown some very detailed Life story work by foster children that had been completed by the child, foster carer and family support workers. Some children also had photo albums of special events and holidays. Another foster child kept their memorabilia in a metal box, which had been given to them by their fostering social worker.

Record keeping by foster carers needs to be urgently reviewed as inspectors found no clear expectation or system for ensuring significant events are recorded. Comments in foster carers questionnaires indicate that some feel record keeping to be of secondary importance and time consuming. Although foster carers have been given duplicate books inspectors found that a number of them continue to record information about more than one child in their appointment diaries and others are keeping computerised records.

There is also a need to ensure that fact and opinion are clearly stated in records. There is an issue about what foster carers are doing when a child moves placement. The recent conference arranged by the Foster Care Association included a workshop on child protection and the speaker was encouraging foster carers to retain records in case of an allegation being received. All records relating to a foster child must be returned to the local authority once the child moves on from a foster care placement.

Records relating to foster carers were inspected and although all contained relevant documentation it was more difficult if there was more than one volume.

There was evidence of misfiling with information about other carers, use of corrective fluid, records completed in pencil and some entries not having the full date included and entries not signed. Some entries were clearly personal opinions of the writer and these were not always positive. The findings relating to these records should be explored as they could cause difficulties in the event of access to records or legal processes.

An inspector was provided with reports to be presented to the fostering panel. These included a report for approval, a foster carers review and a proposed long-term foster placement, which was on the Adoption Matching Format. Inspectors were advised that the local authority currently use the adoption-matching format for matching children in long term foster placements but are aware of the need to develop the format for producing a specific matching report for fostering. The foster carers review had in correct information including names and dates of birth and the approval report had contradictions. There is a need for a quality assurance audit on reports provided to the panel.

The Head of Fostering maintains a record of all child protection allegations and complaints. A member of the Safeguarding Team manages Child Protection investigations. There was evidence that a concern received by a prospective foster carer has been investigated and the outcome is being used in the development of the new assessment and recruitment team. A complaint by a foster carer is subject to an independent review by a manager involved in the 11-17 Project.

The fostering service does support kinship care and workers will investigate all possible placements within a family before seeking a placement elsewhere. The larger number of Kinship carers are in the East of the county and a support group has been developed which is co-ordinated by the fostering support workers based in Ipswich.

It was noted at the last inspection that Kinship carers were sometimes reluctant to attending training arranged by the fostering service. A positive development at this year's inspection was that training is sometimes a focus of

the support group meeting. An inspector attended the Kinship support group and the subject for discussion was the use of Art Therapy. The same terms and conditions apply to Kinship carers and they are represented at the Foster Carers Association meetings.

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	3

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

Yes

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	FS7	33(b)	The Local Authority must continue to review the recruitment process of foster carers, as part of the equality assessment to ensure a wide range of foster carers to meet diverse needs is available.	31/03/06
2	FS9	17 (3)	The Local Authority must ensure that foster carers are provided with sufficient information (at the point of placement) from placing social workers to enable them to care for the children placed with them.	01/12/05
3	FS24	22(1)(2) 32(1) to (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that the recording practice by foster carers is urgently reviewed to ensure an accurate record is maintained of the child's placement	01/12/05
4	FS24	22(1)(2) 32(1) to (3)	The Fostering Service must ensure that records are returned to the placing authority office when a fostering placement has ceased.	01/12/05

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS12	It is recommended that placing social workers should complete the Health Notification and Consent form to enable the LAC Health Team to prioritise and ensure every child/young person has a health care plan.
2	FS12	Placing social workers should routinely inform the LAC Health Team of all placement changes.
3	FS12	The Foster Carers Handbook should include the literature provided by the LAC health team, which details the service, they provide.
4	FS3	The staff interview checklist should be available on each applicants file to provide evidence that any gaps in work records have been explored.
5	FS3	A copy of fostering social workers qualifications should be on their record.
6	FS3	Evidence should be on file to show that where a reference has been requested and not given verification as to reasons why has been followed up.
7	FS7	All training sessions provided to foster carers should include an element that covers cultural and diversity issues.
8	FS13	The decision not to appoint a Personal Education Plan (PEP) co-ordinator should be monitored.
9	FS10	Placing social workers should ensure that foster carers are kept informed of any changes to contact arrangements.
10	FS11	The details at the back of the 'Speak up' booklet about how children can contact The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) should be extended to include foster children.
11	FS14	The health provision of young people leaving care should be reviewed in light of the findings of the Looked After Children Health Team.
12	FS17	The assessments of salaried carers should determine what additional criteria are identified for this group of workers.
13	FS22	Foster carers records should provide written evidence of supervision provided by the fostering social workers.
14	FS25	The final outcomes of investigations listed under Schedule 8 of The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 should be notified routinely to CSCI.
15	FS21	It is recommended that the Mentoring scheme by

		experienced foster carers for new foster carers should be developed.
--	--	--

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Suffolk Area Office

St Vincent House

Cutler Street

Ipswich

Suffolk

IP1 1UQ

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI