



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Merton Fostering Services

Worsfield House

Church Road

Mitcham

Surrey

CR4 3BE

17th,18th,20th,21st,26th, 28th January
2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Merton Fostering Services

Address

Worsfield House, Church Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4
3BE

Local Authority Manager

Dawn Greenidge

Tel No:

020 8545 4220

Address

Worsfield House, Church Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4
3BE

Fax No:

020 8545 4203

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		17th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jean Stuart	071704
Name of Inspector	2	Sandy Patrick	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany Inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Dawn Greenridge	

Introduction to Report and Inspection
Inspection visits
Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings
Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State
Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection
Statutory Requirements from this Inspection
Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings
(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

- D.1. Provider's comments**
- D.2. Action Plan**
- D.3. Provider's agreement**

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Merton Fostering Service is a local authority service that provides temporary and permanent foster carers for children and young people.

The service is based in Worsfold House, Mitcham, Surrey.

The day to day management of the service is the responsibility of the fostering manager. This inspection concentrated on task based care i.e. a time limited, task oriented service. Task orientated care is focused, and on working towards reconciliation with the family, or preparing the child for permanent fostering or adoption.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This inspection was undertaken by one Inspectors over six days in January, a second Inspector was present for four of these days. The inspection demonstrated that the manager and the staff team have worked hard over the past year to meet the Standards, the majority of Standards have been met. Overall the quality of the service provided was good. Comment cards have been received from twenty two Placing Officers, ten foster carers and nine young people. Comments show satisfaction with the service.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1). One Standard was inspected and was met.

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose is available. A childrens' guide is circulated to all children and foster carers. The childrens' Guide is produced in different formats, to ensure the differing needs of children are met.

Fitness to carry on or to Manage a Fostering Service (Standard 2-3). Two Standards were inspected and were met.

From the feedback, observation and information received the Inspectors concluded that the operation of the service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care. Staff files contain the details as required by regulation.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5). Two Standards were inspected and were met.

The fostering manager and her staff demonstrated an awareness of their roles and responsibilities. There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14) Eight Standards were inspected. Eight Standards were met, one Standard was not assessed..

Conversations with carers and staff confirmed that the service provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Files viewed by Inspectors and attendance at a staff meeting demonstrated that children are adequately matched with foster carers, and encouraged to maintain their cultural beliefs. Before foster carers are approved they attend various training courses, are interviewed, references taken and various checks carried out. Foster children are asked for feedback in writing before their reviews.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, and Training staff and Foster Carers. (Standards 15-23) Seven Standards were assessed and were met. Two Standards were not assessed.

All people working in or for the fostering service are subject to a number of checks, including references and Criminal Record Bureau. Social workers have an allocated case load. Supervision takes place with line managers on a four to six weekly basis. Foster carers reported that they feel well supported. All foster carers sign a carer's agreement.

Records (Standards 24-25) 1 Standard was assessed and was partially met. One Standard was not assessed.

The foster service maintains a case record for each foster child, and each foster carer. Records are stored securely. Two issues relating to the case records for children were identified as requiring improvement. An accurate record of placements must be maintained on all foster carers files, and Panel decisions for all carers must be clearly documented.

Fitness of premises for use as Fostering Services (Standard 26) One Standard was assessed and met.

The office accommodation is adequate.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29) Three Standards were assessed and were met.

This is a local authority service and is financed on a regular basis by the financial department of the council. Foster carers reported that they receive payments on time.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30) One Standard was assessed and met.

The fostering Panels meet on a monthly basis. The Panels were child centred and focused on outcomes for children.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31) One Standard was assessed and met.

Policies and procedures are in place for short term care.

Family and Friends as Carers (32) One Standard was not applicable.

This is now the responsibility of the Permanency Team Manager.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Jean Stuart **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Sandy Patrick **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager Norma Vieira **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	30(3)	24.2	An accurate record of placements must be maintained on all foster carers files.	28.2.05
2	30(3)	24.2	Panel decisions for all carers must be clearly documented on foster carers files.	28.1.05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	6
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	17/01/05
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	51.5

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose specifically for the fostering service has been produced, and has been circulated to all staff and foster carers. This was confirmed to the Inspector in meetings with foster carers. This document includes the aims of the service, services provided to children, standards of care, staff details, recruitment, selection, training and support of foster carers. A revised children's guide has been written, the manager reported is being circulated to all children and foster carers receiving task based care. In the last year the service has produced a children's guide for the younger children, the web site is being developed with age appropriate information.

Six questionnaires were received back from children. All children reported that they had been given a children's guide or a leaflet about the service. The fostering service has produced an information pack given out with the placement agreement that has details of the care provided and other age appropriate leaflets.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The completed pre-inspection questionnaire indicates that the fostering manager has a professional qualification together with management experience in fostering. During this inspection the manager demonstrated that she exercises good leadership of the staff. From the feedback, observation and information received the Inspectors concluded that the operation of the service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Five staff files were examined during the course of this inspection. These files contained application forms together with full employment history, satisfactory explanation of any gaps in employment, relevant qualifications, references and Criminal record Bureau checks (CRB).

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering manager and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Staff are able to access support through well-established lines of communication and regular group team meetings and supervision. The inspector attended a staff meeting and noted good communication in the group. For the foster carers there is a support group and individual supervision to enhance communication. The fostering service run a telephone advice line, which is staffed mainly, but not exclusively by supervising social workers: some social workers from the field social work teams are also on the rota. The manager reported to the Inspector that the service runs from 6pm – 1am Monday to Friday, and 10am – 1am weekends and bank holidays. After 1am the emergency duty team is available. Each of the persons involved in the fostering service has a duty to declare any possible conflicts of interest to the organisation. This is a Local Authority run service and the Audit Section monitors the finances. The fostering manager holds a budget of £1 million plus per annum. This is reviewed regularly to ensure that the budget remains within the allocated resources.

The manager agreed that in line with good practice the CSCI would be notified of matters of serious concern.

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

3

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

The fostering manager is employed on a full- time basis. The manager has the responsibilities of the day to day function of the fostering services. The manager informed the Inspectors that she has a job description which clearly sets out her roles and responsibilities and that she is aware of his lines of accountability. Following discussions with the manager, staff group, foster carers and feedback received from the questionnaires, the Inspectors concluded that this service is being managed to a good standard.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspectors sampled four carers' files. The files indicate that before foster carers are approved they attend various trainings courses, are interviewed, references taken and various checks made. The inspectors noted that part of the assessment for foster carer's approval, included the environment. This is to ensure that the house is safe and that the furniture and fittings, meet with the London Borough of Merton requirements. Three foster carers were visited and interviewed during the course of this inspection. The foster carers confirmed that they have a copy of the Foster Carers Handbook. Foster carers reported to the Inspector that a periodic review of each foster carer is completed and that they have regular visits from the supervising social worker.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector observed that fostering service addresses the issues of diversity and promoting equality by organising group discussions, training and in supervision. This is also promoted through the Foster Carer Handbook. Foster children are encouraged to maintain their cultural beliefs and attend functions as necessary. The manager informed the Inspector that a few foster carers on the register provide specialist services e.g. children who have disabilities. The Inspectors were told that there is a rolling programme to recruit foster carers, staff reported to the Inspector that this includes the use of a notice board in the Civic Centre, and the internet.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)		
Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
The inspector observed that attempts are made at all times to ensure that each child placed is carefully matched with a carer who is capable of meeting the assessed needs of the child. The manager reported that this becomes an issue when suitable carers might not be available. In these circumstances the child is placed with as near a matching carer and a more suitable placement searched for as soon as possible. As observed by the Inspector these issues are regularly discussed in supervision and meetings in order to find a solution.		

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The inspector noted that there is department guidance on safe care, which the manager reported has been given to all foster carers. The guidance clearly sets out how to protect children from abuse and what to do in case there was abuse. The Inspector noted that each child has access to their social workers, providing the opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have. There is an advocacy service for Local Authority Children commissioned by the Department, the Listening to Children officer arranges forums and activities to discuss relevant issues specific to the children's needs. The children reported to the inspector that they are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews and provide a confidential written contribution. Two foster carers reported that they "done training on abuse". Staff reported that this is also the subject of discussions between the supervising social workers and foster carers on their home visits.</p> <p>Three children spoken with by the inspector stated that they had a children's guide and that they knew how to make a complaint. They did not see the CSCI as a part of this process but instead spoke of the systems they know and are familiar with. Six children returned survey forms, and reported that they knew how to make a complaint, however the children did not know that they could complain to the CSCI. The Inspector has seen evidence that the children are informed about the CSCI in the children's guide.</p> <p>Overall this indicates children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.</p> <p>The question on bullying is no longer on the children's survey form.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The files sampled by the Inspector demonstrated that depending on circumstances of the child, contacts are maintained with their birth parents and supervised visits if necessary are arranged. The carers reported to the Inspector that contact visits can take different forms, it can be in the foster carers home, or at another selected place away from the home. Carers stated that that Social workers are at hand to provide support and assistance in dealing with any contact issues. The files show that each contact is recorded in detail. The foster carers reported to the inspector that maintaining contacts is crucial to the upbringing of the child, and one foster carer reported that there was "regular contact with the family", another carer reported that contact "happened weekly".

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Feedback from the children questionnaires revealed that children's opinions are sought and listened to. One child reported to the inspector that it was good living with his carers because "they are listened to". The children seen during the inspection were comfortable in their environment, and their manner and words indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster carer.

The inspector noted that two of the field social workers stated in the survey form that they had not been given information on the fostering service complaints procedure. The fostering manager informed the Inspector that all social work teams have an information pack. This was seen by the inspector and contained a user-friendly leaflet on how to complain.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

All foster carers are given full information including the health needs about the child being placed. The carers in the foster carers meeting confirmed this. The inspector is aware that there is a Looked After Children Health Worker in post who ensures that children, foster parents and social workers have the necessary information they need to keep the children healthy. The medical advisor confirmed this. Foster carers reported to the inspector that information on the special medical needs of the child were given before or on the placement of the child

It can be seen on files that arrangements are made by the foster carers to have their own GP's accessible to the foster children as and when this becomes necessary. One child spoke to the inspector of planned trips to the dentist.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The manager indicated to the inspector that all children being fostered are in receipt of education. Four children's files examined during the course of this inspection indicated that children of school age all have links with schools. The foster carers reported to the inspector that they have the responsibilities to ensure that children attend school, any child away from school or absent would be entered in their logbooks and social workers are notified. Meetings concerning school are discussed at the children's review. The manager in discussion with the Inspector reported how the "Chances Team" actively works on preventing exclusion from school, and returning the child to school.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

0

This Standard was not assessed but was fully met on the last inspection.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The files show there is a recruitment strategy in place to recruit foster carers. The Inspector noted that all foster carers are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references taken up and checked to assess suitability. Records are kept of references that have been obtained and their outcomes. All social worker staff have an appropriate qualification to work with children and most of them have three or more years experience in this field. All foster carers and staff undergo the Criminal Records Bureau checks. All personnel involved in fostering service are supported with group meetings, supervisions and trainings. The foster carers are being encouraged to follow the NVQ level 3 courses.

Total number of staff of the agency:

4

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

2

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This is a Local Authority run service with a management structure, which has lines of accountability. The manager reported that social workers have allocated caseloads and are supervised by their line managers on a four weekly basis. This was confirmed to inspectors by social workers, there is a duty system in operation during office hours to answer any queries. One administrative staff supports the fostering service. Foster carers reported to the Inspector that there is adequate communication between the child's social worker and the supervising social worker. The manager reported a meeting is held with the manager for field social workers.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>It was evident during the course of the staff group discussion that staff have worked well together to achieve quality care. The fostering service has a procedure for the recruitment of foster carers from all groups including people from ethnic backgrounds. The fostering service has a very clear assessment and approval process for foster carers but have currently set up a working party to review their practice.</p> <p>The inspector received survey forms from the placing officer for twenty two placed children. The manager showed the Inspector evidence of an information folder, which has been given to each social work team. On all responses the placing social worker stated that the child is being looked after in line with the placement agreement, and that the foster carer was looking after the child “very well” indeed or to an “ok” standard.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This Standard was not assessed but was fully met on the last inspection.		

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
This Standard was not assessed but was fully met on the last inspection.		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The staff said that they are aware of their duties and responsibilities expected of them. Meetings and supervisions for all staff are planned in advance. On examination of the staff files it was noted that staff receive appraisals from their line manager and a copy of this is kept in each person's personnel file. Feedback received from staff revealed that they have opportunities to discuss both business issues and team issues.

A senior member of staff is always available to support and make decision if and when it becomes necessary.

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

Feedback received from the foster carers revealed that that they are well supported by their supervising social workers. Entries are made of meetings, supervision, training and group discussions in the foster carers files. Four foster carers files were examined by the inspectors and were found to be satisfactory.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Each approved foster carer reported to the Inspector that they are supervised by a named supervising social worker. As shown in the Handbook, foster carers have access to other professional support, information and advice. This is to enable the carer to provide consistent, high quality care for a child or young person placed in their home. The inspectors noted that all foster carers signed an agreement. The Handbook sets out standards, policies and guidance of the fostering service. Information on how to make a complaint includes the address and telephone number of the local Commission for Social Care office.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Foster carers, in the carers meeting, reported to the inspector that before foster carers are approved, each carer has an opportunity to talk to existing foster carers about their experience and knowledge. Carers spoke of induction training, and that there is an on-going programme of training and self-development for foster carers to develop their skill. Some foster carers spoken to say that they find it difficult to attend training because of other commitments, experienced foster carers would prefer specific training courses One carer spoke to the inspector of how they are about to commence NVQ training in child care. The pre inspection questionnaire completed by the manager indicated that seven carers are undertaking NVQ level 3 training in child care. Regular meetings are held with the staff to evaluate and review training needs of foster carers.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The inspector noted that the foster care service maintains a case record for each foster child or young person in their foster care. The foster carer keeps a record of events in the child's life, and entries are made of visits by social workers. With a few exceptions (see below) files seen by the inspector were found to be in good order. The inside of the front cover of the files details the contents of each section. The children's files examined at the time of inspection were found to be well organised. The Inspector observed that all documents were appropriately signed and dated

The inspectors noted that the placement sheet at the front of two of the carers file did not reflect the current situation with regard to foster children residing in the house. An accurate record of placements must be maintained on all files.
This issue is the subject of Requirement one.

Changes to the approval of two foster carers, with regard to the number of children they can foster was not clearly reflected on their file. The manager reported that both issues had been discussed with her and an exemption granted for the individuals concerned. The inspector noted that both of these issues were taken to Panel on 28 January 05. Panel decisions for all carers must be clearly documented.
This issue is the subject of Requirement two.

For one carer the inspector noted that a record was not maintained of supervising social worker visits. The manager reported that issues with regard to a staff member who failed to keep records had been appropriately dealt with. The inspector saw the records concerning this staff member.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)			
The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	0
This Standard was not assessed but was fully met on the last inspection.			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This is a Local Authority run service, the manager reported that finance is audited on a regular basis by the finance department of the council.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This is a Local Authority run service and the finance is audited on a regular basis by the finance department of the council.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This is a Local Authority run service.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Foster Carer Handbook gives details about the charges and allowances paid by the fostering service. The charges are agreed at the beginning of each placement and reviewed annually or sooner if there is a need for it. All foster carers spoken with stated that they receive payments on time with details of breakdown of the costs of the services and for additional payments.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Fostering Panels meet on a monthly basis. Observation made of a Panel meeting indicated that they are operating within the terms of reference as agreed. The Vice Chair ensured that all members participated and that all relevant information was considered and that good quality decisions were made about the approval of foster carers. It was noted that the Panels were child-centred and focused on outcomes for children. The social workers when presenting the case to the Panels ensured that the range of information is collated, including applicant's involvement in assessment.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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London Borough of Merton has a "Short Breaks Scheme": The manager reported to the Inspectors that this is a respite care service offered to foster carers with particularly difficult placements. All of the social workers in the Service can deal with the arrangements for short break care. There are policies and procedures in place to meet the needs of this service.	3
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Family and friends as carers is no longer the remit of the Fostering manager. This is now the responsibility of the permanency team manager.	0
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PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 17th, 18th, 20th, 21st, 26th, 28th January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Comments and an action plan were received from the Provider.

These are available to view upon request from the SW London Local Office.

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 10th March 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

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

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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S0000042200.V196777.R01

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