



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Dudley Local Authority Fostering Agency

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Ednam House

1 St James Rd

Dudley

West Midlands

5th January 2004

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

Dudley Local Authority Fostering Service

Address

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Ednam House, 1 St James Rd, Dudley, West Midlands

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Ednam House, 1 St James Rd, Dudley, West Midlands

Fax No:

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 ?

NO

Date of last inspection

NA

Date of Inspection Visit		5th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Christine Lancashire	106038
Name of Inspector	2	Patricia Pollocks	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. 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		Marlene Cauldwell	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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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)

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- 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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of Dudley Local Authority Fostering Agency. 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 NCSC 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.

This is the fostering service of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. It is based in the centre of Dudley in a building shared by other Social Services workers. The aim of this service is 'to offer a family placement to all children looked after by Dudley Metropolitan Borough when this is the agreed option. The underlying principal is 'to provide looked after children in foster care with an experience of family life which promotes their physical and emotional well being and happiness throughout their childhood. Whilst most of the foster placements are organised and supervised by members of the dedicated fostering team, long term fostering is handled by the adoption team and kinship placements are handled by the area teams. The main focus of this inspection was the work of the fostering team.

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 service has not previously been inspected. This report is the first by the National Care Standards Commission under the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. As a result, this report may contain a substantial number of requirements/recommendations. If so, the number of these should fall significantly at the next inspection when the provider will have had time to take account of the legislation and standards and to take action to meet them.

The inspector sought comments about the service from children/young people, foster carers, fostering workers and other professionals. Those who chose to comment expressed their general satisfaction with the service being provided. More specific comments are included in the report.

Statement of Purpose(Standard 1)

This standard was not fully met.

The service has a Statement of Purpose. However, the elected members have not yet approved the children's guide. After approval this should be distributed.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2 and 3)

One of these 2 standards was met.

The manager is appropriately qualified and experienced to carry out her role. Checks are carried out on new applicants for manager posts within the service. However, there is no evidence that checks on existing staff are renewed every three years.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 and 5)

One of these 2 standards was met.

There are clear lines of accountability within the service. There are arrangements for ensuring quality. However, parts of the service are managed by other teams within the department. It is necessary for the service to nominate a manager to the NCSC. This person should be responsible for the fostering service, so it will be necessary for some reorganisation of the service to take place, or for a senior manager over all the parts of the service to be nominated.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

6 of these 9 standards were met, including 2 where the standard was exceeded.

The foster homes visited by the inspectors were found to be suitable environments. The foster carers are made aware of Health and Safety issues and these are discussed at the time of approval. The inspectors were informed that there are occasional placements, which are above the approved number for the carer. These should not occur. The service needs to have a formal process for ensuring that children who are placed overnight in an emergency are moved to a more suitable location the next day. There is an emphasis on valuing diversity within the service. The service has identified the need to recruit more Black and Asian carers and attempts are being made to do this. The carers are provided with information about the protection of children. However, information about bullying needs to

be included. Foster carers have a good understanding of and commitment to enabling children to maintain contact with their birth families where appropriate. There are good systems for encouraging children to express their views. However some children said that they did not know the contact details for their Area social worker. There are good arrangements for ensuring that the health needs of children are met. The service places a very high priority on ensuring that educational needs are met. Young people are enabled to develop independence skills. However, the service needs to develop suitable guidance in this area.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

7 of these 9 standards were met, including one where the standard was exceeded.

There are good arrangements for the recruitment and organisation of staff. Staff are appropriately supervised and have good opportunities for training. The department has a 'Whistle Blowing' policy for staff but the inspectors could find no similar advice for carers and this needs to be developed. Carers indicated that they receive appropriate support, but some were unclear about the nature of the supervisory relationship. Carers have access to a wide range of training opportunities.

Records (Standards 24 and 25)

These standards were not fully met.

Whilst adequate records are maintained in most respects, the inspectors found that the LAC paperwork was not complete in relation to children in foster placements. It is recognised that this is the responsibility of the area social workers. There were also differences between information recorded in the electronic system and the manual system. This should be addressed. Staff also reported difficulties with reliability of the IT systems.

Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This standard is met.

The premises are adequate, with limited working space and parking facilities. There are secure facilities for the storage of information. There is disability access to the ground floor of the building.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

These standards are met.

The service operated within the financial policies and procedures of Dudley MBC.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard is met.

There are procedures which govern the operation of the panel. The panel is suitably composed and was observed to function appropriately.

Short-Term Breaks (Standard 31) - This standard is not applicable.

This service is provided by an independent provider.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard is not met.

The Area teams manage this area. The inspectors were unable to confirm that kinship carers receive supervision, appraisal and training at an equivalent level to other carers. It is recommended that the service should consider how to bring kinship care practices into line with their own processes and practices.

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?

NA

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	

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 **Christine Lancashire** **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager **Mike Gerard** **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 and recommendations 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	3	FS1	<p>The manager must ensure that the Children's Guide contains details of how to contact the NCSC.</p> <p>The manager must distribute the Children's Guide as detailed in Reg. 3 (4).</p>	The local authority must provide an action plan detailing how and when requirements 1-8 will be met
2	20	FS3FS15	The manager must ensure that there is a system to ensure that all Criminal Records Bureau checks are repeated on a three-yearly basis. This should include all staff.	
3	10	FS5	The service must explore the possibilities of merging all the fostering services under one manager or nominate a senior manager, who oversees all the services, to the NCSC.	
4	34 & 38	FS6	<p>The manager must ensure that foster carers remain within their approved numbers.</p> <p>The manager must ensure that there is a formal process for ensuring that any young person is moved to more a more suitable placement immediately after any emergency overnight placement.</p>	

5	17	FS9	The manager must ensure that there are suitable procedures to enable foster carers to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to provide foster carers with support in these circumstances.	
6	17	FS14	The service should develop a policy, handbook entries and suitable training in the area of preparation for adulthood.	
7	12	FS18	The manager must ensure that carers have access to a 'Whistle Blowing' policy.	

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
1	FS11	It is recommended that fostering workers should ensure that each child has the contact number of their social worker as well as that of the fostering team worker at the time of placement.
2	FS12FS24	It is recommended that greater efforts should be made to collate and record all the necessary information in relation to each child, including obtaining the correct LAC paperwork, appropriately completed.
3	FS16	It is recommended that the service may find it useful for some joint training to take place between area and fostering social workers or for the induction process in each team to include short placements in other teams.
4	FS18FS21	It is recommended that the role of the social worker as supervisor should be clarified and made more explicit to all foster carers.
5	FS25	It is recommended that, if two systems are used to record data, there should be a means of ensuring that they both show the same details.
6	FS32	It is recommended that the service should consider how to bring kinship care practices into line with their own processes and practices.

* 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	15
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	YES
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	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	5/1/2004
Time of Inspection	10:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	105

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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?
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There is a clear Statement of Purpose, which includes the required information as required by standard 1.4 and clearly sets out the services provided. This is approved by the elected members on an annual basis and is made available to interested parties. The fostering service's policies, procedures and written guidance for staff reflect the contents of the Statement of Purpose. The children's guide summarises this information in an accessible form. The children's guide has been produced but this is still in draft form and is awaiting approval by elected members. It is necessary to ensure that this guide includes details of how to contact the NCSC. This was discussed with the manager.	
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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

The manager of the fostering service has a CQSW, management diploma and NVQ5 in management in addition to experience in this field. The manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and is pro-active in initiating changes, which enhance the service to children. Staff confirmed that there is an open culture within the service. Foster carers commented that they value the approachability of the manager.

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?

2

The inspectors received verbal confirmation that telephone enquiries are made to follow up references in respect of persons managing the fostering service. Standard recruitment processes are carried out in respect of all staff and records are maintained of references received. Criminal Records Bureau checks are obtained in relation to all newly employed staff at all levels. However, there is no system for ensuring that checks are renewed in relation to existing staff on a three-yearly basis.

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 lines of accountability within the service are clearly identified in the Statement of Purpose. The structure of the service is set out in the policy and procedure manual. The service is managed financially by the Senior Management Team of the department and this is supported by the financial services section. Accounts are available for scrutiny and the service is operating within its budget. Information regarding the charges for services and the amounts paid to foster carers is available to relevant people. Monthly printouts are available to the manager. Carers, managers and staff are aware of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Staff files confirmed that the manager has a clear job description and staff confirmed that lines of accountability are clear. These are recorded in the Statement of Purpose. The staff and the manager confirmed that there are clear and suitable arrangements for the provision of cover when the manager is absent. In relation to the management of the whole service, the inspectors discussed the situation whereby although a manager manages the fostering team, this team only deals with the short and medium term foster placements. The adoption team supervises long term fostering and kinship care placements are arranged by the area team social workers. It is, therefore necessary to identify a manager over all the fostering services, as the first point at which this is possible is Assistant Director level. The inspectors recommend that this is explored further by the managers and teams involved.

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?
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<p>The foster carers' handbook provides written guidance on Health and Safety issues in the home and environment and foster carers receive training in this area. The policy and procedure documents and the handbook specify the need to review each home annually and to inspect the premises against the Health and Safety standards. Health and Safety issues are discussed at panel at the time of approval and annual review. The inspectors visited four foster homes and these were found to be warm, adequately furnished. They were decorated and maintained to good standards of cleanliness and hygiene. Those homes providing for young children were equipped with suitable gates and other equipment. Preparation for foster carers covers Health and Safety issues and carers are made aware of their responsibilities in this respect. Supervising social workers check that the transport used by carers is appropriate and suitable to the needs of the child. Foster carers had been made aware that they may be interviewed or visited as part of the inspection process.</p> <p>During the course of the inspection the inspectors heard of examples of young people being placed in emergencies over and above the approval level for the carers. If it is appropriate in such circumstances, the approval status should be changed. There should be a formal process for ensuring that any young person is moved to more a more suitable placement immediately after any emergency overnight placement.</p>	
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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 handbook and the policies and procedures draw the attention of staff and carers to issues of equal opportunities. There is a short statement of guidance in assisting carers to care for a child placed from a different culture to their own. Carers are expected to attend a training course on caring for children with disabilities and one on understanding racism and heritage. The Department contributes to an annual Valuing Diversity Children's Conference with the surrounding authorities. Carers also attend this. The fostering team is diverse in terms of ethnic background and staff confirmed that information and expertise is exchanged between members of the team. Although the service has some carers from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, the manager and team have identified the need for further recruitment of Black and Asian carers to provide greater choice and diversity. Visits to foster carers and conversations with children revealed examples of children being given encouragement to pursue talents, interests and hobbies. The department holds award ceremonies to celebrate and recognise the achievement of children in care in a wide range of fields. These are valued by the children and the carers, who spoke with enthusiasm about these events.

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 assessments of carers specify their strengths and weaknesses and outline the reasons for specific approvals. These elements are also discussed at the panel at the time of approval and review. Placement decisions consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs and these are matched as closely as possible with the characteristics of the foster family. Workers confirmed that attempts are made to match specific young people to appropriate placements at all times, but there are constraints on matching which arise from the number of placements available and the number of referrals at times. From the perspective of the Area social workers, some expressed a feeling that they would like opportunities to discuss particular aspects of certain young people in more detail.

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?	2
<p>The foster carers' handbook identifies appropriate forms of control. It is clear that smacking, or any form of physical chastisement is not allowed. Carers are expected to sign to indicate that they will abide by these standards. There is a joint protocol for children who go missing within the West Midlands Area. This has been approved by the Area Child Protection Committee. Carers have been advised of the appropriate action to take. There is a system for monitoring these incidents and a report is sent to the Departmental Management Team on a monthly basis. Meetings are planned with the police to review practice in this area. Each carer is expected to attend courses on Self Care and Allegations, Caring for Children who have been Sexually Abused, and Sex and Sexuality. There are management systems to collate details of incidents of a Child Protection nature and these are reviewed annually. There are internal procedures, which result in significant concerns or complaints being taken to the Fostering Panel. Foster carers indicated awareness of the need to ensure that children in their care do not experience bullying. They were aware of arrangements within the education service to address this. However, the inspectors found no evidence of guidance or a policy within the fostering service in relation to children being bullied. There should be procedures to enable foster carers to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to help foster carers cope with it.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%

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?	4
<p>The foster carers' handbook specifies the need to promote contact between children and families and to encourage carers to enable this contact within their own homes where appropriate. The Policies and Procedures manual details support and guidance in relation to this issue. The LAC procedures ensure that contact is addressed at each stage of the planning process. Foster carers provided examples of work, which had been undertaken to ensure that children were enabled to maintain the agreed level of contact with significant people in their lives and they also demonstrated awareness of the need to provide additional support to the child prior to and after contact. They recognised the emotional effect on the child and, in some cases, described significant changes in behaviour. Carers demonstrated an impressive degree of sensitivity to the issues involved.</p>		

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

The foster carers' handbook encourages carers to listen to children and provides information on advocacy, complaints and children's rights. The service is a member of the Black Country Children's Rights project and runs a 'Just Say It' group for children in the care of the local authority. The inspectors attended a meeting of this group and were impressed to learn about the areas in which the opinions of the young people had made a difference to aspects of the service. Young people are also involved in the assessment panel and the 'Who Cares' initiative. Use is made of 'Viewpoint', the computer programme which aims to enable young people to contribute more effectively to their review process. Inspectors were concerned to find that not all the young people consulted had access to their area social workers' telephone numbers and that some never had an opportunity to see their social worker outside the foster home. Hopefully, all young people will be provided with a contact number when the children's guide is distributed. It is acknowledged that area teams are not under the management of the fostering manager. However, the issue of contact outside the home needs to be raised.

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

The foster carers' handbook provides information for carers on managing the health needs of children in placement. Training is provided in first aid, HIV/Aids and child development. Each carer is expected to keep records of health needs, immunisations and interventions and social workers are expected to provide carers with full health details at the time of placement. This is not always possible, as social workers do not always have access to this information, especially where children are placed in an emergency. However, this information should be provided as soon as possible and foster carers reported that it is not always provided within reasonable timescales. Use is made of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and a half-day per week is provided for consultation for carers on managing distressed children. The manager is introducing new files for carers to try to ensure that the correct records are maintained. There is a nominated health professional with responsibility for children in care in the borough and this person is a member of the fostering panel.

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?**

4

The service places a very high priority on meeting the educational needs of children who are looked after. The carers' handbook, the policies and procedures and the new Joint Education policy identify the role of carers in this area and support, guidance and information is available to encourage their role. The education support team drives this process and the inspectors were impressed with the enthusiasm and creativity of the manager of this team, who also participates in the fostering panel. Records of achievement and exclusion are maintained. The position of children without school placements is reviewed monthly at joint education and social services meetings. The inspectors attended a meeting of foster carers at which they were provided with additional information and advice in relation to educational achievement. A range of resources such as worksheets and books is made available by the educational support team.

Young people in foster care demonstrated evidence of their educational achievements to the inspectors. They also said that they valued the award ceremonies which are held to celebrate the achievements of children in care in Dudley.

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?**

2

The foster carer handbook does not mention preparation for adulthood. The inspectors were unable to confirm the existence of any written guidance for carers to follow in this area. It is clear from conversations with carers and young people that carers do enable young people to develop daily living skills within the family. Pathway plans were also made available to demonstrate that there is planning in this respect.

The service should develop a policy, handbook entries and suitable training in this area. Young people expressed the view that they would prefer to retain their area social worker throughout their time in care, rather than be allocated to a member of another team to oversee their transition to independence. However, this is beyond the remit of the fostering team and these comments have been passed on to the relevant manager.

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?

2

There is a written procedure for the recruitment and selection of staff and all staff are required to undergo training in fair and effective recruitment before they can participate in the selection process. The staff files demonstrated that the departmental policy is followed and that only staff with appropriate qualifications are appointed. Inspectors were unable to confirm that there are processes which are specific to childcare and that these are in line with the Warner recommendations. The manager reports that references are followed up by telephone calls. Examination of the staff files revealed that checks and references are confirmed against a checklist. Personnel staff confirmed that new entrants are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau and that repeat checks are planned for every three years. However, staff appointed prior to the establishment of the CRB are not scheduled for repeat checks. Checks must be renewed every three years.

Total number of staff of the agency:

13

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

X

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**

There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability, but, as has been mentioned earlier in this report, the manager of the fostering service does not have responsibility over the workers who arrange and monitor the long term and kinship placements. The service has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and to assign tasks to appropriate members of staff. All workers have job descriptions and access to relevant policies and procedures. There are systems to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively. Staff and carers undertake ongoing training and skills development. There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support and procedures for dealing with enquiries from prospective carers. The service has access to appropriate advice in relation to childcare, medical and educational matters. Fostering social workers displayed a good understanding of their role. However, some Area social workers revealed uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of the fostering social workers. It may be useful for some joint training to take place or for the induction process in each team to include short placements in other teams.

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**

The fostering team consists of 7 social workers, 2 senior practitioners, 1 support staff and 2 administrative staff. Examination of the files confirmed that all staff have qualifications which are appropriate to their role. There is a cover system to provide professional and managerial support when the manager is absent. The team is considered by the inspectors to be adequate to meet the work of the service, with no staff carrying more than 10 families to support. The current vacancy is being addressed by imminent recruitment. The manager reports that the service has a well-organised, annual recruitment of carers in addition to periodic enquiries. A local person has been employed to provide promotional materials and to exploit all advertising possibilities. The service is recruiting around 20 new families per year and losing 14. Staff report that they are able to manage the volume of assessments within the team, when fully staffed, and sessional workers are employed for this purpose when there are shortages in capacity. The manager has identified a need to try to recruit more carers from minority ethnic backgrounds and efforts are continually being made to do this.

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?**

2

The service follows Dudley MBC's employment practices and these are based on principles of equal opportunities. The foster carers' handbook specifies out of hours support systems for carers, which include a 24-hour advice service from members of the fostering team. Supervision is provided monthly to carers and staff, in addition to annual reviews/appraisals at which future training and development needs are identified. However, the inspectors found that, despite having signed supervision agreements, some foster carers were not clear about the role of the fostering social worker as supervisor. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is clarity about the role of the fostering worker. Insurance and Health and Safety needs are clearly outlined in the Foster carers' handbook and these are checked annually. The department has a 'Whistle Blowing' policy for staff but the inspectors could find no similar advice for carers. The service should devise a suitable policy for carers in this respect.

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?**

3

The policies and procedures manual details induction, supervision and appraisal arrangements. There are procedures for identifying training needs for staff. Training policies reflect the policies of the service and include joint sessions with carers. Staff confirmed that they have access to a range of courses and regular involvement in staff allocation meetings.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

All staff are supervised by the manager on a 4-6 weekly basis. These sessions are recorded and filed. The manager is seeking to include senior practitioners in supervisory duties in order to enhance the level of supervision available to staff. Staff are able to attend monthly staff meetings in addition to the weekly allocation meetings. They confirmed that they receive a good level of support.

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**

The foster carers' handbook details the processes and avenues of support available for foster carers. The role of the carer and that of the supervising social worker are clearly defined in the literature. Not all of the carers spoken with were clear about the supervisory role of the social worker and some saw this relationship only in terms of support and advocacy. The role of the social worker as supervisor should be clarified and made more explicit to all foster carers.

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**

All carers have an allocated supervisory social worker who provides them with monthly supervision and annual appraisal. The carers confirmed that they are reliably and well supported by their social workers. All carers are supplied with a copy of the foster carers' handbook, the education handbook and are currently being issued with new recording files. Some are being provided with computers. There is information in relation to support systems, complaints processes and Child Protection procedures. Each carer's file includes a system for recording concerns in relation to the carer. One serious, or three less serious issues of concern lead to a referral to panel for consideration of removal from the register.

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?****4**

The carers' handbook and the policies and procedures manual confirm that carers have access to a range of induction and ongoing training courses. A 'buddying' system exists for new carers and more experienced carers confirmed that they participate in the training of new carers. All training is reviewed annually. As would be expected, carers demonstrate various degrees of interest in the training process. Some are very enthusiastic about all opportunities to learn more. Others are reported to exhibit more reluctance to attend courses. These issues are explored by the supervising social workers. The service may find it helpful in this respect to identify mandatory training sessions and to ensure annual refresher courses in some areas.

The inspectors were impressed with the establishment and success of a 'Children Who Foster' group which has been run by the service for several years. The group provides advocacy, support, rewards and the opportunity to share issues, with each other and caring adults, for the birth children of foster carers. Developmental plans in this area include the identification of premises to establish a base from which support and training can be provided to people involved in fostering.

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

The policies and procedures and the foster carer handbook detail the information which should be held on each child by the service. The inspectors were unable to confirm that the social workers' files contained the appropriate information in all cases. Carers were found to maintain more detailed information once the child was in placement. However, of those sampled, no files contained the necessary information. Efforts should be made to collate and record all the necessary information in relation to each child. This will involve ensuring that the area social workers supply the necessary information at the time of referral or as soon as possible afterwards.

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?

2

Confidential records are maintained on carers and these are held securely. The inspectors were unable to confirm that there is a system for monitoring the quality and adequacy of the files. Information in relation to young people was limited and the inspectors found it difficult on occasions to ascertain which children were still in placement from examining the files. Electronic records are also maintained and these are more up to date in relation to placements, but if two systems are used, there must be a means of ensuring that they both show the same data. Staff reported some difficulties with the IT systems used.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	239
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	750
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	738
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	14
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	9
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	108.50
Maximum £	956.76

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

The staff offices are adequate. There is a secure entrance and there are lockable cabinets for the storage of information. All staff and, in particular, administrative staff, have limited space in which to work. Although there are IT systems which are used to collate and store information in relation to the service, staff report difficulties which have led to frustration. There is limited parking at the location. There is access for wheelchair users to the ground floor of the building.

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

The financial aspects of the service are overseen by Dudley MBC. Regulations and guidelines in relation to financial matters, such as PAYE and National Insurance are conformed with.

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

There are procedures and systems to ensure that appropriate financial processes are employed in relation to this service. Managers monitor spending and budgets for which they are responsible and all transactions are subject to the procedures of the MBC. Charges for services and payments to carers are available to interested parties.

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

There is a written policy in relation to fostering allowances. This is available to prospective and approved foster carers. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

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

There are procedures which cover the composition and conduct of the fostering panel. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on panel members. The independent panel members include people with expertise in education and health. There are representatives of users of fostering services. The panel was observed to carry out its function appropriately and to be suitably composed. There are procedures which cover decision making when not all of the panel members are in agreement.

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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This standard is not applicable. The services of an independent provider are used.	
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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?	2
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Family and friends as carers are managed within the field social work teams. They are assessed and supported by field social workers and their approval is required by panel. The assessment process is the same as that for other carers. The inspectors were unable to confirm that kinship carers were receiving supervision, appraisal and training at an equivalent level to other carers. It is recommended that the service should consider how to bring kinship care practices into line with their own processes and practices.

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 5th January 2004m of Dudley LA Fostering and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

- Amendments to the report were necessary
- Comments were received from the provider
- Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report
- 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

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 (Please see attached letter), 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
- Action plan was received at the point of publication
- Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion
- Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion
- Provider has declined to provide an action plan
- Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC 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 Dudley LA Fostering 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 Dudley LA Fostering 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.