



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service

Saxon Court
502 Avebury Boulevard
Milton Keynes
Bucks
MK9 3HS

25th – 29th October 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

Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service

Address

Saxon Court, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes,
Bucks, MK9 3HS

Local Authority Manager

Pat Callear

Tel No:

01908 691691

Address

Saxon Court, 502 Avebury Boulevard, Milton Keynes,
Bucks, MK9 3HS

Fax No:

01908253251

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

27/10/03

Date of Inspection Visit		25th –29 th October 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		9.30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Mr Rob Smith	114335
Name of Inspector	2	Mrs Moira Jones	105274
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		Pat Callear –Fostering Manager	

CONTENTS

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 Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service. 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.

This was an inspection of the fostering service run by Milton Keynes Council which is a unitary authority covering the town of Milton Keynes and its immediate environs.

The current service was supporting over 100 foster care households at the time of this inspection covering a range of specific functions. These included short and longer term fostering placements and a short break fostering scheme for children with disabilities. A significant number of the short and longer term placements were family and friends placements where children were placed with members of their extended family.

The fostering manager and staff team were centrally located in Milton Keynes, sharing office space with the main social services teams of the local authority.

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.)

Standard 1 Statement of Purpose

This standard was partially met with minor shortfalls. An appropriate and detailed statement of purpose was in place along with good information sources for older children. Work was still outstanding on information for younger children and those with disabilities.

Standards 2-3 Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

Both these standards were fully met. The service was very well managed by a competent and respected manager who fulfilled the requisite fitness requirements.

Standards 4-5 Management of the fostering service

Both these standards were fully met. Effective management structures were in place to organise and prioritise the work of the service and there was good clarity about roles and responsibilities within the fostering service. The work of the service was effectively monitored both within the service and by broader local authority mechanisms. The Family Link respite service for disabled children was now better integrated into mainstream service expectations.

Standards 6-14 Securing and promoting welfare

Six of these nine standards were fully met; three had minor shortfalls.

Good attention was paid to ensuring foster carers provided safe and appropriate physical environments. Diversity issues were appropriately addressed in carer training, supervision and household reviews and services were provided to support promotion of children's differing ethnic and cultural identities. Careful consideration was paid to matching considerations where this was feasible and carer approval terms were well respected.

All concerns arising about foster carers' treatment of children were robustly and independently investigated and appropriate guidance and training on child protection matters was in place. More focused attention on the position and needs of Family Link carers was however advised. Clear guidance was available for carers on matters of discipline, safe caring and the management of bullying. No concerns were identified in any of these areas.

Support for contact arrangements was good and contact was positively promoted by carers where this was in children's best interests. Day to day consultation with foster children by carers was good although better input on overall service quality was needed.

Children's health care needs were well met and good support was provided for children with more complex needs. Educational achievement was generally well supported although there was evidence of patchy carer awareness of the availability of specialist advice and support on educational matters.

Standards 15-23 Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

Five of these nine standards were fully met; four had minor shortfalls.

The core processes for recruitment and vetting of staff were satisfactory although there were still some minor inconsistencies in record keeping in this area.

The support and supervision of staff was very good and appropriate appraisal and training arrangements were in place. Staffing levels were just satisfactory to meet the current demand on the service and will need to be kept under close review. The staff team was very experienced and qualified and had remained very stable with little turnover and low sickness levels. Despite the pressure of work morale was high and team members enjoyed working for the service.

The service continued to work toward increasing carer numbers and particular emphasis was being placed on recruiting specialist teenage and contract carers for more challenging young people. The continued growth in family and friends placements placed particular demands on the service, which were being met well by the team. Assessments of new carers were thorough and challenging although there were some minor inconsistencies in record keeping and the timely processing of CRB checks for household members.

The local authority was acting appropriately in its role as employer of staff and retainer of foster carers. Support and supervision structures for both were good and due attention was paid to staff and carers own health and safety issues.

There were comprehensive strategies in place for support of carers who were very complimentary about the quality of direct support offered to them by the fostering service. Concerns were raised however about inconsistencies in some children's social workers visiting regularity. Carers also felt that the local Fostering Forum needed revisiting to ensure it remained a useful support for all carers and inspectors felt that the current inconsistent use of sessional worker support needed examination.

Inspectors identified a number of past delays in respect of household review regularity which had arisen in part due to staff shortages and considered prioritisation of most urgent reviews. New monitoring systems should ensure this does not reoccur in future.

A good range of training was on offer to carers but take up was often poor and the service needed to continue to look at ways of ensuring courses were as accessible as possible. Alongside this issue there were clearly problems in getting all carers to undertake the identified core training. This is matter the service will need to continue to pursue and that inspectors felt could be more explicitly dealt with in the course of household reviews.

Standards 24-25 Records

Both these standards were fully met with good accessible records on children and carers being maintained. All required central records and register were being maintained appropriately.

Standard 26 Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service

This standard was partially met. While the general equipping and security of the office was satisfactory the sharing of an open plan office environment led to problems of noise, occasional lack of desk/computer availability and a clear shortage of areas for confidential discussions and meetings.

Standards 27-29 Financial requirements

As this was a local authority service two of these standards were not inspected against. The third standard was fully met. Systems for payments to carers worked generally smoothly and the whole structure of payments and allowances was shortly being reviewed to ensure equitable access for all carers and competitiveness with other fostering service providers.

Standard 30 Fostering panels

This standard was fully met. The fostering panel was properly constituted and working effectively. Training for panel members had taken place and more was planned for the future. The panel was providing appropriate scrutiny of, and challenge to, approval assessments and review reports.

Standard 31 Short-term breaks

This standard was fully met.

The Family Link service, providing short-term respite care for children with disabilities, continued to work effectively and progress continued with its adoption of mainstream foster care service expectations. This aspect of the service appropriately balanced the role of carers with that of children's own families, who remained their primary carers.

Standard 32 Family and friends as carers

This standard was fully met.

The service continued to approve and support a growing number of family and friends carers. These placements provided significant challenges to professional assessment skills and to overall workload management, which the service was currently meeting well.

Overall summary

This inspection provided ample evidence that Milton Keynes fostering service was an effective and well run service that was well regarded by staff, carers and placed children. Attention had been paid to all the areas of requirement and recommendation arising at the last inspection and all required work was now either complete or in the process of completion.

Feedback from the children who submitted questionnaires, or who met inspectors, was uniformly positive about their experience of being fostered by Milton Keynes. Similarly positive feedback was received from carers about the quality of support they received. The staff team was hardworking, motivated and well led by a good manager.

Inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff who contributed to the process of this inspection for their time and tolerance.

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:

YES

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		

Regulatory Inspector	Rob Smith	Signature	
Second Inspector	Moira Jones	Signature	
Regulation Manager	Clive Wooldridge	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	3(3)	FS1	That the fostering service completes outstanding work on provision of relevant information for younger children and those with disabilities	31/05/05
2	20(3)	FS15	That the fostering service ensures all required checks and information are obtained for all staff as part of recruitment processes in line with the expectations of Schedule 1 Fostering Services Regulations 2001	30/11/04 and ongoing
3	29(2)	FS21	That the fostering service ensures reviews of carers' approvals take place at the regularity required under Regulation 29(2)	30/11/04 and ongoing

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	FS9	That the fostering service considers the provision of targeted training and guidance on child protection matters for Family Link carers.

2	FS11	That the fostering service develops systems for more consistent feedback from fostered children on the overall quality of the service provided.
3	FS13	That the fostering service ensures all carers are made aware of the nature of, and routes for access to, support services relating to children's educational needs.
4	FS17	That the local authority maintains close monitoring of the adequacy of the fostering service staffing establishment in the context of its developing workload.
5	FS17	That the fostering service ensures closer attention is paid to recording of agency checks on carer assessment forms and that tighter monitoring of the carrying out of subsequent CRB checks on carer's family members is maintained.
6	FS21	That the fostering service reviews the current effectiveness and value of the Fostering Forum and of the use of sessional workers.
7	FS23	That the fostering service continues to work at improving the accessibility of training course for carers.
8	FS23	That the fostering service continues to reinforce the undertaking of core training by all approved carers and considers how panel approval processes might best be used to support this process.
9	FS26	That the local authority, in its review of office accommodation, improves the level of staff access to confidential meeting areas.

* 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	10
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	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• 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	NO
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	25/10/04
Time of Inspection	09.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	40

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?
----------------------------------	----------------------

The fostering service had a clear and detailed statement of purpose that addressed all the areas required by regulation and standards and accurately reflected the nature of the current services offered. The statement had been recently updated and mandated by the Corporate Parenting Panel of the local authority. Some very minor points, such as the need to update the references to NCSC, (now CSCI), will need to be addressed when the statement is next reviewed.

A good range of complementary information was in place for older placed children providing specific details about aspects of fostering, alongside more generic information aimed at all children looked after by the local authority.

Work was still outstanding on the production of a guide for younger children and for children with disabilities. The feedback from younger children via questionnaires indicated gaps in their knowledge of, for example, how to contact CSCI and complaints processes underlining the need for accessible information on these key safeguards to be put in place.

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 local authority continued to demonstrate its fitness as a provider of fostering services and the fostering manager was well qualified and appropriately experienced for her role. This inspection also further confirmed the evidence from last year's visit that the manager consistently provided a high level of leadership and support for her team and managed the day-to-day operation of the service in an effective and efficient manner.

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
---------------------------	---------------	---

Appropriate checks and references were in place for the fostering manager and were seen at the last inspection. These confirmed that the post holder was a fit and suitable person to manage the service. Systems were in place for renewal of CRB checks at the required intervals and for maintenance of the records required under Schedule 1 of the regulations.

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

There were appropriate systems and structures in place to monitor and control the operation of the fostering service. In part these were provided via the good day to day oversight of service quality and effectiveness offered by the fostering manager, supplemented by more formal structures such as team meetings, staff supervision and appraisal and feedback from fostering panel operations. Broader children's services and local authority audit and monitoring systems oversaw areas such as complaints and child protection investigations, where these arose in relation to fostering services.

It was good to note that the integration of the previously separate Family Link service for children with disabilities continued to progress, ensuring all aspects of the fostering service were managed and monitored in a consistent and equitable way.

There were clearly established roles and responsibilities in place for senior managers, the fostering manager and members of the fostering team. Appropriate financial procedures and related auditing systems were in place. As part of a pressured local authority the service did not usually offer placements to other placing authorities and therefore did not produce specific related information on service costs and charges.

Guidance on potential conflicts of interest had now been extended to include carers, as recommended at the last inspection. This was awaiting finalisation through local authority procedures.

Although not required under regulation to do so the local authority did keep CSCI informed of all key events as listed under Schedule 8 of the standards.

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

1

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.

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	0
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
<p>As already noted the fostering service was judged to be well run with clear duties and responsibilities accorded to managers and team members, which were fully and consistently exercised. This judgement was based on the feedback from team members and foster carers and on observations made by inspectors during the course of the inspection.</p> <p>Although a formal deputising arrangement was not in place team members were able to confirm that more senior and experienced members of the team and senior managers worked well together to cover any absences on the part of the team manager.</p>		

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
---------------------------	---------------	---

Appropriate measures were in place to ensure that the physical standards of foster care settings were maintained at satisfactory levels. These matters were addressed as part of initial assessments and approval stages and subsequently through household reviews and family placement officer visits and supervision. Environmental risk assessment formats were being developed more fully to include explanatory comment and judgement by family placement officers. Training input on health and safety formed part of the foster carer training programme for the current year and more detailed health and safety guidance was planned for the new foster carer handbook that was in the final stages of revision. A more consistent approach was now being paid to issues of bedroom sharing and related risk assessments.

The sample of foster carer households visited during this inspection did not prompt any health and safety concerns on the part of inspectors.

The revision of information for carers now included reference to the role of CSCI and made clear the possibility of visits to households from CSCI inspectors.

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 local authority had a clear strategy and policy framework in place for overall attention to the valuing and promotion of diversity across all its services. Within the fostering service attempts continued to recruit carers from a broader range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and, within the constraints of current carer resources, good effort was put into trying to create appropriate ethnic and cultural matching.

There was ready access to interpreting services for children without English as a first language and support for carers caring for children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Carers had access to training on diversity issues and this area of practice was addressed in the course of preparation training, approvals and household reviews.

Carers working in the Family Link service or others caring for children with disabilities had access to equipment and services required to meet children's needs.

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

Appropriate attention was paid to matching considerations within the constraints of current resources. For short-term carers, where pre-placement timescales were often short, the service was careful to respect conditions of approval and appropriate decision-making processes were in place to validate any decisions to go outside approval ranges. This was confirmed in feedback from carers who indicated the fostering service was always respectful of their views with regard to new placements and any changes in approval terms.

For longer-term and permanency placements, including family and friends placements, more detailed matching processes and reporting was undertaken. Good examples of matching reports were seen on the sample of files inspected. Foster carers' feedback indicated generally good sharing of information prior to placements being made. Where feasible an introductory process for children being newly placed was undertaken.

As already noted, matching in terms of ethnicity and culture remained a challenge given the lower number of carers from diverse backgrounds, but, where feasible, this was considered and appropriate advice and input was provided for children and carers where such matching could not be achieved. Feedback from children provided examples of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds being supported and celebrated by their carers.

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

The local authority had clear policies and procedures in place to safeguard the welfare of placed children and robust systems for addressing any arising concerns. A number of situations had arisen in the last year indicating possible concern about carers' practice – these had all been promptly followed up and investigated by staff outside the immediate service as potential child protection matters. None had subsequently been regarded as child protection incidents.

Clear revised guidance was being finalised for carers on responses to allegations of disclosures and a range of child protection training was available – a course specifically for carers was also planned for the near future. Inspectors did judge that, in addition, a more targeted approach was needed to address the particular situation of Family Link carers who, due to their sometimes infrequent usage and to their more direct relationship with children's parents, can be in particularly isolated and difficult position if child protection concerns arise. The response inspectors received from Family Link carers also indicated a lack of familiarity with standard procedures.

Written guidance on safe caring practice for carers was backed up by training in this area and in coping with allegations made. Some additional courses on safe caring were provided for male carers to address their particular vulnerability. Discussion with carers, observation of practice and scrutiny of files confirmed fostering staff were particularly alert to the potential risks faced by carers and their families and took these fully into account in the consideration of new placements and the monitoring of existing ones.

Guidance on appropriate discipline and sanctions was provided to carers, again backed up by related training. No concerns were raised by children or placing social workers in relation to discipline matters.

Clear expectations were in place for carers' management and reporting of children absent without authority. Revised guidance on bullying was seen by inspectors and was due to be included in the revision of the foster carers handbook. None of the children who contacted the inspectors raised concerns about bullying.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied: (NB As a full survey of foster children was not undertaken no figure has been provided here)	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 fostering service placed appropriate emphasis in its training, supervision and support of carers on the importance of birth family contact for children, where this was safe and in the child's best interests. Feedback from young people and discussions with carers confirmed that much positive contact with birth families took place. A number of situations were noted where carers were good advocates on behalf of young people in re-establishing and developing previous family links.

Some direct contact was managed by carers themselves, in other circumstances social workers or sessional staff accompanied children to contact sessions outside of the foster home. Carers confirmed that due account was taken of potential risks to them or their family when contact arrangements were being proposed.

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?****2**

There were a number of formal structures in place to ascertain the views of placed young people and their families about the nature and quality of care provided to them. These included individual care reviews for young people and household reviews of foster carers, where formal input from looked after children was sought. On a more day-to-day basis the feedback from young people in questionnaires and discussions was that they were widely consulted by carers about their care arrangements and key developments and activities in foster households. That same feedback did indicate however a lack of input into broader developments in the fostering service outside of the context of individual households. The YP Inc forum for looked after children was available to fostered children but not widely used. Managers indicated an intention to develop a computer package, Viewpoint Interactive, as a means of getting a better level of service development feedback from fostered children.

There was insufficient contact with birth families during the course of this inspection to judge whether they felt their views on foster care were being elicited and responded to appropriately.

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**

Discussion with carers and young people, and scrutiny of children's files, confirmed health care needs were being well met in foster placements and that a good focus was being maintained on healthy eating and lifestyles. Carers spoken to by inspectors felt they usually had adequate information on health care needs at the time of placement and were provided with any specialist advice and equipment they might subsequently need. For children with more complex ongoing health care needs, support and advice was offered by a specialist nurse for looked after children.

The service had clear expectations of carers with respect to GP and dental registration and checkups and children's health progress was monitored via statutory care reviews. Training was provided for carers in health and hygiene matters, manual handling and first aid. Training had also been provided for carers who might have to carry out invasive medication procedures.

Older children were provided with a range of information and guidance on health and developmental issues in the Yippee Pack provided for all older looked after children.

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?**

2

Again feedback from young people confirmed generally good support for educational achievement by carers and the fostering service. Files sampled showed good levels of ongoing contact and liaison by carers with placed children's schools and support for more difficult educational situations was offered by the Looked After Children Education team. Inspectors did however come across two examples of situations where children's educational placements were in difficulty and carers were apparently not made aware of the role of this specialist team and left to sort matters out for themselves. In one case this had resulted in a child being out of school for a number of months.

Foster children's ongoing educational achievements and progress were monitored, and celebrated, as part of overall local authority systems for looked after children

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?**

3

Due to the age of the children spoken with during this inspection inspectors did not gain a clear view of the effectiveness of the service in meeting the needs of children moving on to adulthood and independence. There were however clear structures in place for the drawing up and implementation of Pathway plans and for the involvement of the local Options for Independence social work team at an appropriate stage of the care planning process. On a pragmatic level it appeared foster carers had a reasonable understanding of the need to encourage and develop young people's life skills.

This area will be more fully explored at subsequent inspections.

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

Following minor revisions made after the last inspection the fostering service had in place appropriate guidance and procedures for recruitment of staff. The files of two newly appointed staff were checked. One had all the required checks and information in place. With regard to the other, who had been an internal applicant, due to conflicting advice from internal HR staff only one internal reference was on file and it had a CRB clearance that fell outside normal portability criteria. Advice was given to the fostering manager to clarify expectations on both these issues.

Social work staff were appropriately qualified and very experienced in both general children's work and the specific area of family placement practice. Inexperienced or unqualified staff did not carry out areas of work for which they were not equipped, although in retrospect the manager recognised that difficulties experienced with one established set of carers might have been better handled by a more experienced family placement officer rather than a social work assistant.

Total number of staff of the agency:

11

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

0

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

As already noted the fostering service was very well managed and organised by the fostering manager. This was confirmed in the overall very positive feedback from staff, carers and placing officers.

Although the team was working to full capacity, workloads were well balanced and prioritised in line with the local authority's strategic targets and the current needs of carers and children. Staff worked in a flexible and considerate manner adapting well to the varying pressures and deadlines inherent in the work. A particular example was the effort that had been put into ensuring assessments subsequent to placements made under Regulation 38 were progressed swiftly.

Good support, supervision and personal development structures were in place for staff and carers and the service and a clear framework of appropriate policy, procedure and guidance continued to be developed. Office based administrative support and systems appeared generally satisfactory, although some staff were coping better than others with the increasing IT expectations of the job.

Appropriate arrangements were in place for input of specialist medical, educational and legal support for both staff and carers.

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?

2

The social work team continued to be stable with very little turnover and low reported levels of sickness absence - only a few established staffing hours remained vacant. The team was however being worked to capacity by the level of incoming work, particularly in the area of Regulation 38 placements where time lines were critical. It was indicative that the fostering manager had had to take on number of recent carer assessments to relieve pressure on team members. It was good to note that the local authority had obtained funding for a new social work post specifically to take the lead on family and friends work, which will help relieve some of the current pressure.

Senior managers will need to keep a close eye on the adequacy of staffing levels in the light of both the growing level of complex family and friends placement work and the projected growth of Milton Keynes, which will of course impact on all areas of the local authority's service delivery. Discussion with the Head of Children's services confirmed an acute awareness on his part of the tightness of staffing capacity in the fostering team and of the need to develop good staffing recruitment and retention packages.

With regard to carers the service continued to respond to the growth in family and friends placements and was targeting its further recruitment at teenage carers where most current demand lay. Options for developing more specialist contract carers and remand carers were

also being explored in conjunction with neighbouring authorities on a joint commissioning basis. General recruitment and these specific initiatives were being taken forward by the service's development manager alongside other developmental tasks for both the fostering and permanency sides of the family placement service. The development manager's workload was also reaching critical mass and the viability of retaining responsibility for such a wide range of tasks will need to be kept under review.

The assessment process for new carers was thorough and covered all the areas required by the regulations and standards. A number of recent assessments were seen in the context of observing the fostering panel and were noted to be of a good standard and it was reassuring to note one previous assessment undertaken by an independent worker had been thoroughly revisited by the service's own staff because of concerns about its validity.

Inspectors did note however some inconsistency on assessment reports in the recording of which background checks had been carried with other agencies. The manager was advised to clarify this part of the process and to ensure that, if any particular checks were not undertaken, then a reason for this needed to be noted as part of the assessment report. On one file it was also noted that a CRB had not yet been initiated for a child of the family who had reached the age of 18. Although this was an exception in the context of other files seen, where such checks were undertaken in a timely fashion for all key members of households, a check needed to be undertaken immediately.

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?

3

The local authority was exercising its responsibilities towards staff and carers in a consistent and appropriate manner. Employment practices were sound and overseen by the HR section of the local authority. Support and supervision structures for staff and carers were good and out of hours access to management advice was readily available.

Health and safety matters, allowing for the planned training and development of guidance for carers, were being satisfactorily addressed. Whistle blowing guidance for carers was in the process of finalisation.

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 local authority provided good opportunities for staff training with access to post qualifying awards as well as more specific targeted training related to the current needs of the service, alongside more generic children's services training courses. Joint training with carers took place where appropriate. Staff spoken with felt well supported in their training needs.

Appropriate induction, probationary and appraisal systems were in place and being implemented.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

As already outlined elsewhere in this report there were clear lines of responsibility and accountability within and outside the fostering service. All staff had written job descriptions and were clear about their roles.

Regular formal recorded supervision was provided for all social work staff and annual appraisals took place. Regular team meetings took place, which all staff were expected to attend.

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? 2**

The local authority had a range of appropriate systems in place for working with and supporting carers. These included:

- membership of the Fostering Network for all approved carers;
- regular formal supervision and telephone support;
- access to specialist consultancy support;
- local Fostering Forum;
- respite care support and holiday breaks;
- input from sessional workers;
- out of hours family placement duty system; and
- access to specialist health and education staff.

As at the last inspection carers were uniformly positive about the direct support offered by the family placement team staff and the ease of access to immediate advice and support, even during out of hours periods.

With regard to specific aspects of the support structure, some carers felt the local Fostering Forum was not currently a particularly productive experience due to the small number who regularly attended and the difficulty of establishing agendas that suited a wider range of carers needs. Some had therefore had ceased to attend.

The use of the newly appointed sessional workers to assist with practical support of carers (e.g. with transport, contact arrangements child care etc) was also sporadic and their availability and roles apparently not fully understood by all carers. This is a potentially valuable resource, the use of which needs to be reviewed to ensure maximum benefit for carers and to avoid the loss of staff who are simply not being used consistently enough.

The inspection identified a number of delays in the regularity of foster carer household reviews. In part these delays had been due to pressure of work generated by Regulation 38 placements in the past year or so, and new administrative systems had been put in place to ensure family placement staff were notified well in advance of reviews being required. The manager also put in place a system for separate flagging up to her of any overdue reviews. Inspectors trust that these combined initiatives will ensure better ongoing monitoring of the review regularity and that should any future reviews be delayed that an explanation of the circumstances is clearly recorded on carer files. Inspectors also noted some confusion on files between reviews dates and the date of subsequent approval by the fostering panel, which may have contributed to the apparent lapses in strict regularity. Inspectors advised clearer indication of both dates on panel decision sheets.

Carers and foster children were clear about the different roles of family placement officers and children's allocated social workers. With regard to the latter there was some very critical feedback from a number of foster carers and children about an inadequate level of input and response to queries from some children's social workers, exacerbated by a perception of high levels of turnover of these staff. While social worker performance fell outside the remit of this inspection, this area of concern was partially reflected in inspection findings, as, in two of the sample cases inspected, social worker visiting had not met the statutory requirements. This issue was raised with the Head of Children's services who indicated that, on the basis of recent internal auditing, these were isolated examples.

It was recognised by carers and family placement staff that children's social work teams were currently under particular pressure and it was clear that family placement staff often helped to sort out urgent situations when social workers could not respond immediately.

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

The fostering service provided an excellent level of supervision and support for carers. Formal supervision for mainstream carers was usually conducted monthly with written records maintained on carer files. The regularity for Family Link carers was usually three monthly but for both sets of carers more meetings were scheduled if required and there was a high level of telephone contact and support provided in addition. Occasional unannounced visits took place and the findings of these were now described in more detail in household review reports.

As detailed under the previous standard there was a range of additional practical support for carers. Up to date foster carer agreements were in place for all carers on the files inspected and covered the areas expected by regulations.

The foster care handbook was in the final stages of updating and this contained a comprehensive range of practical information for carers. Inspectors supported the view of some of the carers they met that an additional glossary of terms and abbreviations would be useful to help carers negotiate typical social services professional language and references.

Appropriate records and information was retained about any complaints or investigations into concerns about foster carers conduct.

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?

2

The fostering service was offering a good and varied range of pre and post approval training for foster carers covering key areas such as child protection, safe caring, health and safety, diversity issues etc. A number of the courses were identified as core training that all approved carers were expected to undertake.

It was however clear that take-up continued to be a problem, with very low attendance figures for some of the core courses over the last year. While it was evident that the manager had been looking to provide a more flexible form of training delivery with, for example, shorter evening and weekend training slots, child care support on offer, and bespoke courses just for foster carers, a number of carers still felt that aspects of the training organisation needed looking at to maximise the likelihood of attendance. Key issues they raised were the timing of whole day courses clashing with school run obligations and the lack of a crèche facility. Approved carers who worked full-time found course attendance particularly difficult and this impacted disproportionately on the male partners in carers households.

The service was additionally having to work with a number of carers who for a variety of reasons were reluctant to undertake training. Inspectors recognised the sensitivity of this issue, especially with regard to family and friends placements and longer-standing carers. However with regard to mainstream and Family Link carers the service will need to continue to emphasise the essential nature of the core training modules and ensure this remains highlighted in supervision and household review processes. A number of the carers who had attended training expressed some disquiet about other carers effectively slipping through the training net and felt this was unfair.

Inspectors felt that the fostering panel might be of assistance in making more consistently clear in its processes of approval and household review where training was considered to be essential and if necessary making continuing approval contingent upon completion.

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?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

As this was a local authority service the case records for children placed were those maintained by their allocated social workers in the local authority. The children's files seen during the course of this inspection were generally well-maintained and contained the necessary range of information. There were clear departmental policies and procedures governing record-keeping, file contents and access to records. Files were subject to occasional audit.

As highlighted at the last inspection the fostering service still uses what is now outdated LAC planning documentation to form the foster placement agreement. The inspectors were content that this still be used pending issue of new formats as part of the integrated children's planning process.

Foster carers who contacted inspectors during the course of this inspection were generally satisfied with the quality and range of information provided on children placed with them. Training on record-keeping was provided for carers and family placement officers continued to monitor and encourage carers to maintain accurate diary records of all key events affecting the children in their care.

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?** 3

Foster carer files seen during the inspection were generally well maintained and contained the range of information required by regulations. The process of introduction of new proformas, file front sheets and chronologies was continuing across both mainstream and Family Link carers to ensure a consistent standard of information retention and presentation.

Central registers for children and carers were being maintained appropriately by central administrative staff. Admin staff anticipated that an additional module specifically aimed at the needs of the fostering service would shortly be introduced as part of the local authority's main database system. This will aid more efficient sharing of data and support more sophisticated information retrieval and analysis.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	104
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	87
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	117
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	26
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	33
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	70.91
Maximum £	419.10

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?

2

The fostering service was based in the main offices of the local authority in central Milton Keynes. As such all the expectations with regard to security, insurance, file storage and IT systems were fully met.

The actual office space used by fostering staff was however less than ideal. Apart from the fostering manager, who had her own small office, the team shared a large open plan office area with the rest of the social services frontline staff. While this had clear benefits in terms of ease of communication the noise, intermittent hot desking and lack of access to separate rooms for confidential discussions were problematic. Inspectors were informed that an overall review of office space in the local authority was underway and that some imminent relocation of staff will ease current pressure on desk space; however attention still needs to be paid to improving access to rooms where confidential issues can be discussed.

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?	9
---------------------------	---------------	---

This standard was not assessed due to the fostering service being run by a local authority. It was evident however that there was an ongoing commitment at senior management levels to providing funding to support and develop the quality of the service as a key plank of the local authority's strategies for meeting the needs of local children and families.

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?	9
---------------------------	---------------	---

This standard was not assessed due to the fostering service being run by a local authority. All financial procedures and accounts were however subject to normal local authority financial audit and monitoring mechanisms.

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

Carers were provided with a range of information on standard allowances, additional payments and tax matters. Feedback to inspectors confirmed that systems for regular payments worked efficiently, although the process for more one-off reimbursements, for example for child care costs or car mileage, was occasionally quite delayed.

The fostering manager was in the process of commissioning a full in-house analysis of the local authority's scheme of payments to carers to ensure equitability, accessibility, transparency and competitiveness with other authorities and independent agencies.

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
---------------------------	---------------	---

This inspection focused solely on the functioning of the fostering panel. Permanent fostering placements were processed by the separate adoption and permanency panel within the local authority. The functioning of this panel will be addressed in the context of the CSCI inspection of the local authority's adoption services.

The fostering panel was appropriately constituted and supported by clear procedures and guidance. The issues raised for action in relation to the panel at the last inspection had all been addressed. There was satisfactory access to external medical expertise and to advice from health and education professionals on the panel. The chair of the panel was unchanged since the last inspection and was appropriately qualified and experienced for the role.

It was positive to note that training for panel members had taken place and that the intention was to provide this on a regular annual basis in the future. Inspectors would also support the intention of the chair to provide a structure of regular individual support for panel members.

Inspectors attended a panel meeting as part of this inspection and were impressed with the organisation and smooth running of the overall operation. On the basis of direct observation and scrutiny of past panel minutes inspectors judged that initial approvals and household reviews were being scrutinised and monitored by panel appropriately. Contributions from non-professional members of the panel were still somewhat limited but this will no doubt develop over time as these members become more confident in their roles.

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?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

At the last inspection inspectors were concerned about aspects of the organisation of the historically separate Family Link respite care service targeted at the needs of children with disabilities. Since that inspection the integration of this service under the control of the fostering manager had progressed and the service was now more fully meeting the expectations of the regulations and standards. Further progress as indicated elsewhere in this report, in areas such as child protection training and awareness, was however still needed and a number of Family Link carers clearly still did not see themselves as foster carers.

Inspectors received little direct feedback from families making use of the service but, equally, no concerns were raised and the staff and carers spoken with were positive about the service and the role it played in supporting local families. There was an appropriate recognition of the continuing primary role of parents in planning and meeting the care needs of children placed through the Family Link service.

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?
---------------------------	---------------

As part of the local authority's overall strategy for working with children looked after and children in need the fostering service continued to assess and support an increasing number of family and friends placements.

These assessments and placements placed particular pressure on fostering service staff, which inspectors felt they were handling very well. The subtleties and complexities of good enough parenting judgements in such settings were being appropriately balanced against existing expectations of more mainstream carers, by both assessing staff and the fostering panel.

Fostering staff were offering good support to family and friends placements and were particularly alert to the impact on family relationships and dynamics they might have.

Clear procedures and expectations were in place to ensure the initiation of any family and friends placements under Regulation 38 was promptly picked up for subsequent assessment and approval by the fostering team.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

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 25th – 29th October 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

With reference to Standard 13, the inspection noted two examples of where children's educational placements were in difficulty, and it was said that the carers were unaware of the specialist team, and its role in indicating an appropriate educational provision.

In one case, the difficulties were historical and certainly over the last eighteen months the Looked After Children Educational Team had very successfully negotiated a transfer from a mainstream educational provider to alternative provision for this particular young person.

The Looked After Education Team had also communicated directly with all carers about their role in supporting educational placements (at least two letters have been sent out over the last year), as well as informing carers about specific items, e.g. summer activities put on by the LACET team and the library concessions for foster carers and LAC.

In Standard 21, in terms of overdue reviews, there is in place now a very clear process of flagging up any problems in this area. However, at a time when the team were working to full capacity, the decision had to be taken if the reviews would be recommending no change of approval, and there had not been any major challenges, e.g. allegations or complaints, then in terms of staff time, the team had to prioritise assessments and more contentious reviews.

With reference to Standard 12, the Health Assessment Team has recently been awarded first prize in the PCT's clinical governance awards. It was deemed an excellent example of good working practices across agencies, and the submission is included with this.

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 December 2004, 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 Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service 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 Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service 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
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

S0000053806.V180946.R01

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



The paper used in this document is supplied from a sustainable source