

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

South Tyneside MBC Fostering

**South Tyneside Fostering Service
16 Barrington Street
South Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE33 1AN**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Graham

Announced Inspection
14th - 28th February 2006 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

Reader Information

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

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

Those outcomes are:

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	South Tyneside MBC Fostering
Address	South Tyneside Fostering Service 16 Barrington Street South Shields Tyne and Wear NE33 1AN
Telephone number	0191 4238500
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	South Tyneside Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Brian Morgan
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 23rd March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service is located within the Children's Services Division of the Social Care and Health Directorate of South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council.

The continuing aim of the service is to provide high quality fostering placements to secure the best possible outcomes for looked after children.

The fostering service has five categories of carer; these are mainstream carers, relative carers, respite carers, teenage scheme carers and permanence scheme carers. Mainstream carers provide a range of placements including pre-adoptive placements, emergency placements, as well as short, medium and long-term placements. At the time of the inspection the service has in excess of 100 approved foster carers who, at that time were providing substitute family care to over 130 children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years.

SUMMARY

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

The Inspector would like to thank the children, carers and staff at South Tyneside Fostering for their warm welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered over a 7 day period through:

- Talking individually with children, carers and staff
- Visiting foster carers' homes
- Group discussions with staff and carers
- Talking with the managers of the service
- Reading children's, carers and staff files
- Reading policies, procedures and records
- Children's questionnaires
- Carers questionnaires
- Children's social workers questionnaires
- Observing the fostering panel
- Talking with the Chair of the fostering panel

South Tyneside Fostering is a good fostering agency, which supports its foster carers well to make sure that children are safe and well looked after whilst living away from home. Some examples of the things children said included, 'I'm happy and I've got a nice family which I'm part of'. "You get helped a lot", "Life is better" and, I get "nice food, holidays, clothes and help"

The agency's staff and foster carers are carefully chosen and checks are made to make sure that they are suitable and able to work safely with children. The support provided to carers by their supervising social workers and the training offered to foster carers is good and assists them to help children with the variety of problems that they may have. Nearly all of the children's own social workers confirmed that they felt that the children they had placed were being looked after "very well indeed".

What the service does well:

All placing social workers responding to our questionnaire stated that they would use South Tyneside's Fostering service again. All felt that the children placed were receiving the care agreed in their care plan and all were described as being safe in their placements. Placing social workers also provided some specific views and observations of the service and its carers; these included: "The placement has benefited the children greatly, it is extremely positive and well supported by the fostering service". The children receive care which is "warm, nurturing, but with firm boundaries and regular routines". The carers are "warm and welcoming and are very sensitive to the child's needs". "I feel the child's case was dealt with, with sensitivity and swiftness and all concerned have worked in partnership to establish the right placement for them". The

child "lives in a stable, safe and structured environment" and, the carers provide "a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, clean tidy and maintained to a high standard", also: the child benefits from a "caring, stable and supportive environment".

South Tyneside Fostering give their foster carers lots of support and work to ensure that the children they place with them also receive the support they need. Fostering officers regularly visit carers and are always available for carers to talk to. Of the carers themselves, nearly all of those responding by questionnaire or interviewed were "very satisfied" with the support they received from the fostering service. No one was dissatisfied with the support they received. One carer stated: "I have very good support from my fostering officer. I can ring them anytime for advice and support and there is always someone to talk to". A number of others highlighted the good level of support they receive from their fostering officers as being one of the best things about the service.

Staff and foster carers are carefully selected to make sure that they are safe to work with children. Carers are given initial training and opportunities for further training so that they understand the needs of the children living in foster care.

The vast majority of young people responding by questionnaire or interviewed during the inspection could identify no "worst things" about the service, although a number highlighted 'separation from their family' as being the worst thing about foster care. Positively, one young person stated: " I haven't grown up with my own family, but I understand why". Examples of children's views of the best things included, the "people who look after me", "I have the best foster mam and dad", "holidays, going places, being clean and healthy" and, my carers are: "the best foster carers in the world"

Children are supported well by their carers with their education, contact with friends & family, health and activities. Staff working at South Tyneside Fostering have a lot of experience and childcare qualifications and know a lot about keeping children safe and protected. The service has lots of helpful information, which can be easily understood by children.

In response to the question ' is there anything you'd like the inspector to put in their report on your fostering service? one young person stated: "I think they are very kind and fair"

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has introduced new procedures, which work to ensure that staff files include all required information. This now includes confirmation that written references regarding staff have also been confirmed separately by telephone and that a recent photograph is kept on individual staff files. This gives better evidence of their identity and adds to the proof of their suitability to work with children.

The children's register has been reviewed to ensure that it both complies with all matters listed in Schedule 2 of the Fostering service regulations and gives an accurate description of where children live and move to.

The agency has continued to recruit carers, whilst working to target the recruitment programme at carers who can meet the needs of all children requiring placement.

There was good evidence that the written information provided to foster carer's in relation to children placed with them is being updated as changes occur. This helps to ensure that children are cared for safely and successfully.

To support good matching, the placements officer for the service visits each new carer following their approval to gain a fuller understanding of their experience and abilities. This has had a positive impact on the successful matching of children to foster carers.

The agency has further developed policies and procedures and a recruitment strategy in relation to short break carers. The training programme for relatives and friends approved as foster carers has been further reviewed and developed. The successful participation of a number of foster carers in NVQ training has had a positive impact and further improved carers understanding and practice in meeting the care needs of children and young people.

The service is trying to further improve placement choice for children by continuing to work with organisations and projects that encourage people from different ethnic backgrounds to become foster carers.

What they could do better:

The overwhelming view of the foster carers working for South Tyneside Fostering is that no changes are needed to the service.

When placing children with carers, their social workers and staff at the agency should ensure that carers are given all the written information they need to care for children successfully and safely.

Social workers placing children with the service should visit the children regularly and ask for their opinion about the care they receive.

The agency should pursue it's plan to increase the overall membership and expertise of the fostering panel should be implemented. Minutes from panel meetings would benefit from the inclusion of more detail regarding individual contributions to the decision making process.

The service should continue to work to ensure that sufficient placement choice exists for children who are placed. The service should continue it's work to recruit more carers from a range of ethnic communities and backgrounds.

Arrangements to manage the work of the training officer as well as the administrative support available within the service should be reviewed to ensure that this support is provided as effectively as possible.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

South Tyneside Fostering effectively monitors and promotes the health of children placed with their carers.

EVIDENCE:

Children in placement who were interviewed or responded by questionnaire confirmed that their carers gave good support and advice to ensure that their health needs were met. Responses commented positively on this aspect of their care and examples were given of help with their diet, personal hygiene and exercise. One young person said of their carers that "They encourage me to eat fruit, we always have a lot of fruit in the house and we have proper dinners, these are normally with veg." Another stated that their carers helped them to stay healthy by "taking me to the dentists, opticians, doctors and giving me medicine when I'm poorly". Another older child stated "I am able to attend the doctors on my own and can talk to my carers about any problems".

An examination of both children's and carers' records confirmed that the agency promotes children's health. Any issues relating to children's health, accidents and incidents are recorded by staff and are monitored by the manager of the service.

Those carers visited during the inspection responded positively when asked if they felt that they were able to ensure that children's health care needs were being met and received support in achieving this. There was good evidence of carers working to ensure that children cared for are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians and that they attend all necessary appointments. One carer highlighted how the children now receive their annual health assessments at home rather than the doctor's surgery. They also gave an example of raising a specific health concern on behalf of a young child during

their health review and reported positively how they had been listened to and how the concern had been referred on to a specialist for further diagnosis.

There was also good evidence that carers provide comprehensive information on how the immediate health needs of children are being met to the child's statutory review meetings. To further ensure that children's health needs are being met, the agency provides carers with initial and additional training opportunities in health, hygiene and first aid through the annual programme of training offered to them.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

South Tyneside staff and carers have a good understanding of child protection procedures and actively seek to make safe, caring and secure placements where children's welfare is safeguarded. The agency works to ensure that complaints procedures are known and are available to all children, carers and placing social workers. Procedures for the recruitment, selection and vetting of staff and carers are thorough. The agency's fostering panel monitors placements and the outcomes for children. Although the service is still working to add some one with expertise in education to the fostering panel, this has not as yet been concluded.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has good systems in place to recruit staff and carers who have the qualities and experience necessary to work directly and safely with children. An examination of staff and carers files showed that the service takes up all of the necessary safeguarding checks including enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures. As recommended at the previous inspection, staff files now include a recent photograph of the individual staff member. As with previous inspections, those carers interviewed or responding by questionnaire were very positive regarding the skills and knowledge of staff and how these were used to support carers in their work with children and young people.

Each carer's home visited as part of the inspection presented a pleasant homely environment, made safe from identifiable hazards. One placing social worker described the environment for the child they had placed as having a "friendly and welcoming atmosphere, clean, tidy and maintained to a high standard." Health and safety checks are completed by the service as part of the initial assessment of new carers and are subsequently updated at each annual review. Arrangements to ensure "Safe Caring" of children by foster carers are well established; written agreements to ensure this are put in place and are regularly reviewed, an example of an agreement not including the date of completion was highlighted to the manager and immediately rectified. The manager highlighted the additional work being planned by the service to further involve and explain to children the "safe caring" policy for each household.

The manager also highlighted the ongoing limitations to placement choice. However, the service has continued to work positively to address this through their recruitment programme aimed at increasing the number of available carers. Positively, none of the carers or children who were visited or responded by questionnaire raised any concerns regarding the matching processes in place. To support good matching, the placements officer for the service visits each new carer following their approval to gain a fuller understanding of their experience and abilities. This has had a positive impact on the successful matching of children to carers, despite the limitations in placement choice. A placement referral form aimed at improving the quality of initial information used in provisional matching is also used effectively by the service.

A number of carers visited commented positively on the arrangements in place to 'match' children successfully with them. Carers described how introductory visits had taken place with some children and how this had helped both them and the children to get to know each other better.

Some carers did highlight problems in receiving initial written information about children placed with them. In each of these situations there was evidence that issues around lack of initial information and LAC documentation were being raised by carers and fostering staff with the social workers placing the child.

All carers receive training and are provided with written guidance regarding child protection procedures and the safe care of children. The manager of the service has extensive experience in this area of work and the social workers employed by the service are experienced practitioners. Discussion with the manager and review of previous incidents demonstrated that the agency reacts promptly and effectively when any such concerns arise. Carers interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of child protection procedures and symptoms of abuse. A detailed anti-bullying policy is also in place and is provided and explained to carers and children. Any incidents of bullying and

responses to it are recorded; these are monitored and reviewed by the service manager. A number of incidents were reviewed, each providing positive evidence of the steps taken to support and protect the child subject to it. Through their pre-inspection questionnaire, one young person stated positively: "I said I was getting bullied and meetings changed that".

Although the service itself works effectively to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect, the response from young people interviewed and by questionnaire highlighted a lack of contact for many of them with their placing social worker. When asked, nearly all children responding stated that they see their own social worker only sometimes. The children's files examined each contained a good visiting record monitor, used to record visits to them by their own social worker, however from the eight files examined only one example was found of this chart being completed.

Those placing social workers responding by questionnaire provided many positive statements regarding the qualities of carers in both protecting children and dealing with any behavioural difficulties. All were able to confirm that the measures of control used by foster carers with the children placed had been explained to them and that they found these acceptable. All confirmed that they felt that the children they had placed were safe with their carers. One stated that: "the child is well cared for in this placement, the carers are very aware of all safety issues". Another stated that the child "has responded well to the boundaries set by the carers".

All of the young people responding by questionnaire or interviewed were clear with regard to what sanctions were allowed, gave examples of how and why they were used by their carers and had no issues with them. Positively, a number were able to highlight that their relationships with their carers were so good that sanctions had never been necessary. The service has a clear restraint policy and "Team-Teach" training is made available to carers. Although some children confirmed that they had 'been held' to prevent them hurting themselves, others or causing damage, none raised any concerns regarding these events.

Almost all of the children responding by questionnaire or interviewed stated that they had written information telling them how to make a complaint. Nearly half were also aware of how to contact the Commission directly. Almost all of the placing social workers stated that they were aware of the complaints procedure provided by the service. All carers were equally clear regarding how to make a complaint on behalf of the child placed with them if this were necessary.

A meeting of the fostering panel was attended as part of the inspection. The service manager was able to confirm that although the previous recommendation that a member with direct experience of education has not been implemented, efforts to achieve this are continuing, they also confirmed

that the quality and experience of the overall panel membership may be further strengthened through the recruitment of a member with direct experience of being fostered themselves.

As in previous inspections, panel members appeared comfortable in their roles and the presentation of written reports for their information was generally good. Discussion was thorough with members able to raise and challenge any issues regarding the potential suitability of proposed foster carers. Previous panel minutes were reviewed, these were clear with regard to outcomes from panel deliberations, but would benefit from the inclusion of more detail regarding individual contributions to the decision making process.

The service manager outlined the steps being taken to assist the panel in fulfilling its quality monitoring responsibilities through planned improvements in the level of information provided to them regarding carer reviews and outcomes. Ongoing training opportunities for panel members have been highlighted by the service, with a potential training programme currently under consideration.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7, 13 and 31

South Tyneside Fostering through its foster carers works to provide placements, which value diversity and promote equality. Children placed with the agency's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes their educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The carers interviewed demonstrated an understanding of diversity, equality and anti-discriminatory practice. Pre-approval and ongoing training opportunities are provided to carers through the well-organised training programme, the programme includes a specific module on valuing diversity. Written guidance is provided to carers by the service through their fostering handbook.

Conversations with foster carers and foster children and responses from questionnaires demonstrated that children and young people receive opportunities to develop and pursue individual interests and hobbies and are supported in this. The observations of foster carers interactions with children during the visits to their homes provided many direct examples of their understanding of the development of children and the skills they have and use to enhance the self-esteem of children and young people.

The service has developed good links with the Sahara Project to promote the recruitment of carers from a broader range of ethnic minorities and backgrounds. Staff members from the fostering service have attended training provided by this project. South Tyneside Fostering are also facilitating

additional training and recruitment events planned to take place in support of this initiative, including initial introductions and training for carers themselves.

There was continued evidence of the agency working to provide services for children with a disability, and to provide specialist support to these arrangements.

Through their questionnaire responses and during direct discussion with them, children and young people were very positive regarding the support they receive from their carers with their educational needs. One young person stated: "I love school and college, I get homework and help if I need it, any problems get sorted out ". Discussion with carers with children in education also confirmed both their commitment to and the steps they had taken to support the educational needs of those children, with many examples of their direct work with teachers and education staff in support of the child themselves.

Additional specialist educational support is provided to the service overall by 'The Place' educational project. The fostering service provides training for carers aimed at supporting their ability to promote the educational attainment of the children and young people they care for. The training includes an introduction to ' The Place' project as well as training in Personal Education Plans and the use of educational mentors. Each fostering household is also provided with a computer, used by the children cared for in support of their educational development.

Nearly all of the children and young people interviewed or responding by questionnaire were able to give positive examples of the help and support provided to them by carers in meeting their educational needs and in supporting their personal hobbies and interests. One young person commented that: "I get help with homework, using a computer at home, my foster carer attends parents evenings". Another said of their foster parents: "they encourage me to do work at home and also help me to the best of their ability". Another said that "They (the foster parents) help me with my homework, they also come to school if they are needed".

The service directly monitors how the educational needs of each child are being met through the regular support visits to the carers as well as their annual review reports. The service manager themselves is directly involved in the 'Children in Need (Looked after Children) Education group which is co-ordinated by 'The Place' project. These links are used to ensure that the overall educational policy for children looked after through the service remains clear and that individual carers remain aware of their roles and responsibilities in the education of the children they care for.

The service has continued to develop 'short-break' care, both through ongoing recruitment and the continued work on the development of appropriate policies

and procedures for these carers. The service has increased the numbers of carers able to provide a respite/short break service. With these, the service ensures that the arrangements in place recognise that the parents are the main carers. Staff recruitment has allowed for a dedicated fostering officer to take key responsibility in this area of development on behalf of the service. There was good evidence of the improved links and joint working with the Children with Disability Service in support of this.

A number of carers interviewed confirmed that they had used respite and spoke positively about the benefits of this.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 and 11

The agency makes actively promotes and supports contact between children and their families and friends where this is appropriate. The arrangements put in place to seek children's views about their lives and the care they receive are effective.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements for children are recorded and include any restrictions placed on them. The carers interviewed were aware of contact arrangements for the children in their care; a number of whom were involved in facilitating and/or supervising contact. Placing social workers confirmed that where restrictions in contact had been necessary they were happy with the way that the fostering service and the carers had managed these.

Children interviewed were also aware of the contact arrangements and of any restrictions placed on their contact with relatives and friends. One young person confirmed that their carers would always ask: "how did your contact go".

Those carers responding by questionnaire and interviewed were positive about contact arrangements and their involvement in them. When asked to describe what they did to help foster children maintain contact with their family, carers gave very positive descriptions. Examples included: " I encourage letter writing, birthday and Christmas cards and meeting up with the family through contact". Another stated: " I liaise efficiently with parents and siblings as much as possible at the beginning of the placement and always speak positively about the children. I try to ensure that contact is worthwhile and

healthy". Another said: "The older child is 17 and goes alone, I give bus fare and lunch money. I always show an interest in their contact"

There was also evidence of good support and advice from their supervising social workers. Overall, the service has good arrangements in place to actively encourage contact by children with their birth families, supported by their foster carers.

The agency has very good policies in place regarding consultation and has agreed systems for seeking the views of children placed. It provides children with information about the service through its children's guide. This has been revised with input from the Young People's Participation Officers to make it more 'user friendly'.

Positively, although some young people were unable to confirm that they had received their children's guide the majority of children responding by questionnaire or interviewed said that they had received a copy of it. However, current arrangements to provide this should be further reviewed to ensure that all young people do receive it and are aware of its purpose.

There was evidence within children's files and in discussion with children themselves, that their views are both promoted and presented at their own care review meetings. The service manager highlighted the re-introduction of the 'viewpoint' consultation system, allowing children and young people to present their views through an electronic questionnaire completed on their computer. The manager also highlighted the work of the Young People's Involvement Worker, who has visited young people placed outside the borough to personally encourage and support them in completing their 'viewpoint' contributions to their own care reviews.

Young People's Participation officers have also developed a website for looked after children. It is planned for the children's guide to the fostering service to be added to the website to further promote its availability and use.

Unfortunately, not all of the children interviewed or responding by questionnaire felt that they were well consulted by the agency about the service overall. Half of the children responding by questionnaire and some of those interviewed said that they had not been asked about the service. More positively, almost all of the children responding confirmed that they had been asked for their opinion about their carers by the fostering service.

Equally positively, almost all children interviewed or responding by questionnaire were able to confirm that their carers asked for their opinion either often or sometimes, with half of those responding able to identify positive changes that had occurred as a result of this consultation. Examples were given of positive changes to diet, recreation, health, pocket money, clothing and contact.

The manager highlighted the use of quarterly newsletters to both share information and encourage the views of young people. A small consultative group including both of children in foster care and those that have recently left is also supported and encouraged by the service as a further means of gathering the views of children and young people. The service has also worked positively to fully establish their 'Children Who Foster' group to both consult with and provide support to the children of the foster carers themselves.

All carers interviewed or responding by questionnaire confirmed that they had regular contact with their supervising social worker and were very positive regarding the quality of this support. Positively, the vast majority confirmed that they had also been asked for their opinion regarding the service overall and how it is run. The service also supports a popular "drop-in" facility for carers. This is organised by members of the carers 'representatives group' who also meet regularly with senior managers to give their views and contribute to the ongoing development of the service.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

14 and 29

The agency has good arrangements in place to prepare young people for adulthood. Appropriate and prompt payments are made to carers in accordance with its policies and procedures.

EVIDENCE:

The manager highlighted the protocol (revised in 2005) between the fostering, residential care and leaving care services. The protocol is aimed at ensuring that the services work effectively together to make the transition to independence for young people as seamless and supportive as possible. Managers from each service have liaised and developed a protocol to allow young people moving on to independence to benefit from access to a small number of 'taster flats', these allow a gradual introduction to independent living for these young people whilst allowing them to continue to benefit from the ongoing support of their foster carers.

The manager highlighted the ongoing development of the teenage fee paid scheme whose carers are particularly skilled at helping young people develop independence skills. Carers receive help and advice from their supervising social workers in preparing young people for independence. Training, specific to this role is provided by the agency with carers of older children encouraged to attend. The manager highlighted a recently introduced series of workshops aimed at further developing the advice and support available to carers of children of this age. Questionnaires have been developed for the use of carers and young people, the responses received from them will be used to help map and plan how the workshops will be run.

Arrangements to ensure the regular review of care needs also ensure that when children reach 15 years of age they are allocated a worker from the Leaving Care Team and Independent Living Support Team where this is appropriate. Files examined provided good evidence of pathway plans being introduced at an appropriate age and subsequently being regularly reviewed and monitored.

During one home visit the foster carers highlighted how one young person cared for had been allocated a 'leaving care worker' at an appropriate age. They highlighted how the young person was benefiting from regular visits from this worker, who also liaised closely with the foster carers themselves to ensure good planning and information sharing in support of the young person.

Membership of the young person's consultation group includes some young people who have recently moved on from the fostering service. Their ongoing participation in the group allows them to give their views regarding arrangements put in place to support their preparation and transition into adulthood.

A number of questionnaire responses contained positive comments regarding the support available. One young person highlighted how they had been supported by their carers to find a part-time job and how they were encouraged to save for independent living. Another young person highlighted how their carers would ask them about and help them with "health, college, generally most things, what food I like, clothes, they are presently helping me to furnish my flat"

One placing social worker commented that the "carers provide a solid care package which is age appropriate and encourages her ability to move on to independence"

One foster carer provided their view that "the leaving care worker has been excellent"

During interviews carers confirmed that they receive prompt payments of allowances. There are policies and procedures available to staff and carers in respect of fostering allowances and payments to carers.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

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

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

1, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 32

South Tyneside Fostering is an effectively managed service, held in high regard by its carers. Its team of dedicated, well experienced, qualified and skilled social work practitioners provide good quality supervision and support to its carers'. Management systems and records in use at the service are generally robust.

EVIDENCE:

South Tyneside Fostering has reacted positively to the good practice recommendations made at the last inspection and has worked to further improve those aspects of the service.

Staff files have been reviewed and updated to include all required information. The children's register has been reviewed to ensure that it complies with all matters listed in the Fostering service regulations. A system to follow up written references with telephone enquiries has been introduced. The service has continued in its positive attempts to improve placement choice through their ongoing recruitment drive, particularly the recruitment of carers from a broader range of ethnic communities. There was good evidence that the service has worked to ensure that the written information provided to Foster carer's in relation to children placed with them is regularly reviewed and updated. The agency is developing further the policies and procedures in place as well as the recruitment strategy in relation to short break carers. In addition, training for relatives and friends approved as foster carers has continued to be developed and positively promoted to them. Despite ongoing difficulties, the service has continued in its efforts to recruit a fostering panel member with educational experience.

The agency is held in high regard by its carers and provides good quality support and supervision to staff and carers alike. The overwhelming view of carers was that no changes were needed to improve the service. Through their comments carers highlighted the best things about the service as being the support they receive from their fostering officers, with most able to confirm that they were supported very well. Carers also highlighted good information sharing and consultation as strengths of the service, with their opinion regularly asked for. Carers were also positive about the good variety of training provided to them as well as the arrangements in place to support contact between children, their relatives and friends. The service has clear policies and procedures which outline how carers will be supported.

An examination of staff and carers files found that the agency operates a good system for supervising staff and carers, with information normally well recorded and presented. The manager uses information gathered to monitor the service against its Statement of Purpose and Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. An overall examination of records, discussion with staff, carers, children, questionnaire responses all provided good evidence that the service has been managed and monitored efficiently and effectively.

Administrative records were found to contain all significant information relevant to the operation of the service required by the regulations. There was good evidence of these being used by the manager to assist in the monitoring of the service overall. Notifications of significant events occurring within the service continue to be made. Arrangements to ensure that these are

forwarded to the commission were reviewed and confirmed. The policies and procedures used by the service are based firmly on the National Minimum Standards and associated regulations for Fostering Services.

Foster Care Agreements reviewed by the inspector were found to be compliant with Regulation 28 (Schedule 5 checklist). Some examples of these agreements not being signed by the carers themselves were highlighted to the manager for their action. It was also recommended that copies of foster placement agreements for each child should also be maintained within the files of the carers themselves.

Carers confirmed this through their pre-inspection questionnaire responses and individual interviews that receive a comprehensive handbook and supplementary written guidance regarding the service overall and their role within it.

The current Statement of Purpose (SoP) describing the service has been subject to annual review. The manager confirmed the arrangements in place to ensure that this, along with previous inspection reports are made available for the benefit and information of placing social workers. Most placing social workers responding through their questionnaires stated that they had access to the SoP and previous inspection reports. The service has continued to ensure that young people receive a copy of the Children's Guide, most young people were able to confirm that they had access to it and were aware of its purpose.

The manager regularly monitors the individual workloads of supervising social workers. The effectiveness of the service overall has been further improved by the filling of previously vacant posts. An examination of staff personnel files confirmed that they are experienced, well-qualified and skilled social work practitioners.

The views of carers indicated that the staff team have worked with flexibility and commitment to ensure that the service has been provided to a good standard. Although there is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support, the manager confirmed that some appointments although effective are currently temporary, with this situation continuing to be reviewed. Staff provided positive comments regarding the levels of personal support, supervision and appraisal. Positive views were also received regarding the support provided through their participation in regular team meetings, one of which was attended by the inspector during these visits.

The retention of experienced staff and carers by the service is good. The service maintains detailed information in respect of its carers. The overall recruitment drive to increase the number of carers is continuing. Procedures by which carers are initially assessed are sound and are regularly reviewed. .

The arrangements by which the continued approval of each carer is reviewed annually have been further improved through the use of independent reviewing officers. Occasional examples of delays to annual reviews were noted and fed back to the service manager. With one example they confirmed that the absence through illness of the reviewing officer had contributed to this, they also reported positively that a 'cover' arrangement had now been put in place to minimise any future delays. Discussion with carers also provided good examples of the direct support provided by the fostering service social workers in assisting them both to access and gain advice from the child's social worker.

The agency has an established and comprehensive training programme, with the service positively promoting the attendance of carers. A number of carers have successfully completed NVQ training since the previous inspection. Interviews with carers provided a number of examples of the positive impact of this training on their understanding of care issues and improvements in their care practice. Carers themselves spoke very positively both of the variety and value of the training provided. The training co-ordinator has taken time to visit and consult with other fostering services and has used the information gathered to further develop the training programme for relative carers and encourage their individual participation.

The manager highlighted the commitment of the part-time training co-ordinator who had worked flexibly and arranged their working hours to maximise their availability to the benefit of foster carers and the service overall.

Some child-care support is available to carers to facilitate attendance at training events, however one example of limited access to the provided crèche was fed back to the manager for their review. The programme provides some joint training opportunities for carers and their supervising social workers. There were also examples of the training of carers being presented by the social workers themselves. The individual training needs of carers as well as their participation in training is monitored both by their supervising social workers and through their annual review meetings. Staff members employed by the service who were interviewed during the inspection were positive about the training opportunities provided to them to support their skills and professional development.

Although occasional gaps were evident in the LAC documentation needed to ensure that the care needs of each child are identified and met, there was extensive evidence that carers, their supervising social workers, managers and reviewing officers are pro-active in monitoring the provision of this required documentation by placing social workers and are requesting that any documents outstanding be provided. With most children's files examined there was good evidence of regular monitoring of recorded information by the managers of the placing social workers, however one example of a file which had not been reviewed for a period of two years was highlighted to the

manager of the fostering service for their information. Some of the files contained evidence that visits to children placed by their own social worker were not occurring regularly, this was also confirmed also by the views of some children and young people themselves.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded
2 Standard Almost Met

(Commendable)
(Minor Shortfalls)

3 Standard Met
1 Standard Not Met

(No Shortfalls)
(Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
Standard No	Score
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
Standard No	Score
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
Standard No	Score
7	3
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
Standard No	Score
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
Standard No	Score
14	3
29	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS21	35	Children placed with the service should be visited regularly by their own social worker and asked for their opinion about the care they receive.	01/10/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS8	When placing children with carers, their social workers and staff at the agency should ensure that carers are given all the written information they need to care for children successfully and safely.
2.	FS8	The service should continue to work to ensure that sufficient placement choice exists for children who are placed. The service should continue its work to recruit more carers from a range of ethnic communities and backgrounds.
3.	FS8	Copies of foster placement agreements should be maintained within the files of the child's carers
4.	FS11	Ensure that children are consulted regarding their view on how well the agency is working to meet their needs.

5.	FS16	Arrangements to manage the work of the training officer as well as the administrative support available within the service should be reviewed to ensure that this support is provided as effectively as possible.
6.	FS21	Managers of placing social workers should effectively monitor that they are visiting the children placed regularly and are asking them for their opinion about the care they receive.
7.	FS30	The agency should pursue its plan to increase the overall membership and expertise of the fostering panel should be implemented. Minutes from panel meetings would benefit from the inclusion of more detail regarding individual contributions to the decision making process.

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