



**Making Social Care
Better for People**

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Kingston Fostering Services

**The Guildhall
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT1 1EU**

Lead Inspector
Barry Khabbazi

Announced Inspection
24th October 2005 9:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Kingston Fostering Services
Address	The Guildhall Kingston upon Thames Surrey KT1 1EU
Telephone number	020 8546 2121
Fax number	020 8547 6036
Email address	jenny.rigby@rbk.kingston.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Royal Borough Of Kingston Upon Thames
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Jenny Rigby
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th December 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames Fostering Services is a Local Authority service that provides temporary and permanent foster carers for children and young people.

The service is based in Guildhall 1, High Street, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EU.

The day-to-day management of the service is left to the Team Manager (Family Placements Services).

The types of services offered are: (a) Emergency (b) Short Term Foster Care, (c) Permanent Foster Care, and (d) Short Breaks Scheme.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection occurred over two weeks and involved two inspectors. 5 days were spent at the service's premises, interviewing staff and examining files. Three days were spent inspecting 'off site', visiting foster carers and children placed, or reading questionnaires and other documentation taken away.

The inspectors identified a high level of professionalism in the fostering service and many areas of good practice within Standards have been identified. Although a number of new shortfalls were identified the service was found to be generally good.

Although there are a higher number of requirements in this year's report, the inspectors believe that this could be due to significant staff and resource shortages over the last year. As the staff vacancies have been recruited to now, except for one currently frozen post, it is expected that the connected shortfalls identified will be addressed quickly. Indeed there were already some contingency plans in place to address a number of the areas where shortfalls were identified. This process could also be expediated by recruiting to the currently frozen supervising social worker post, and by relaxing the currently tightened access to use of independent agencies where placements can not be made within the fostering service's own resource of foster carers approved placement numbers.

Bearing the above in mind, a number of the shortfalls may only be a temporary situation, a number of areas have therefore been identified to be monitored on an ongoing basis between now and the next inspection so that the Commission can have an up to date picture of improvements in those areas identified.

What the service does well:

Good quality information in a variety of formats is made available to children. The service has developed, in addition to the written children's guides, an interactive CD Rom for Looked After Children. This is also being further developed. The "Young Livin' " project is also available as a source of information on the internet.

The organisation has maintained a positive staff team dynamic despite staff pressure due to high levels of vacancies over the last year.

Staff qualifications are greater than the minimum standard. The service does not have a bar on the number of senior workers and therefore is in a position to potentially have a team where all staff are senior practitioners.

The organisation uses its resources effectively with the skills of foster carers put to effective and valued use where welcomed by the carer. For example, one foster carer's I.T skills are put to effective use.

The fostering service provides incentives for foster carers that take up training. There is a £25 to £30 allowance for each course attended. There is a £500 allowance for undertaking the NVQ. Core essential training is identified and once this is completed and a period of initial fostering has occurred a second enhanced rate of payment is offered.

The panel work within the National Minimum Standards and these are reviewed against in foster carer reviews. This facilitates a good understanding of the Standards for all staff and foster carers.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Although technically some minor areas still need improvement, the procedure for vetting social work staff has been made more rigorous and checking gaps in employment is now explored in more depth to ensure that children are further protected from undesirable staff.

Further areas of the panel decision-making process have been formalised with a written policy. This will ensure consistent approaches where the panel do not all agree.

A breakdown of complaints and their outcomes is now in the Statement Of Purpose, this document has been further updated and there is access to more information pertaining to the fostering service on the Internet site. This will help provide better and more up to date information.

There has been an increase in admin support hours by 7 hours per week.

What they could do better:

The fostering service needs to have a responsible individual so that areas requiring attention that are beyond the manager's control can be addressed. For example, improving communication between the different sections of children's services, and effective strategies to progress Child Protection investigations in a timely fashion.

Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements occur, the fostering service needs provide the foster carers with {and record} specific additional training, support and information, to facilitate developing the carer's skills {where assessed as required} to enable them to better meet all the child's needs.

Risk assessments need be produced, to identify and reduce the potential impact of any new placement on children already placed.

Each foster carer needs to be provided with all the essential information about potential new placements, so that they can know what needs are to be met and can protect other children placed.

All foster carers must have a Criminal Record Bureau Check and the two staff references required should be from different employers and different individuals. This is needed to protect children from undesirable staff.

Sufficient numbers of supervising social workers and foster carers must be maintained at all times to ensure that the needs of the fostering service in line with the Statement of Purpose can be met.

The fostering service needs to record, monitor and verify all training undertaken by foster carers, including external training. There should be a clearer and standardised filing system and regular file audits to facilitate consistency and quality. The fostering service should explore ways to improve the office-working environment. For example a quiet room for report writing. The panel's role in monitoring quality needs to be expanded to take into account training of foster carers {and refusal to continue training}, and monitoring exemptions to approved placement numbers and categories.

Good practice suggestions;

It is suggested only at this stage, that foster carers who wish, could be provided with a more detailed breakdown of what specific payments are being made.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Children’s needs are generally well identified, and the fostering service promotes the health and development of children well.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carers have comprehensive guidance in respect of their responsibilities regarding the health of the children in their care. Training is provided to foster carers covering health issues. Children in the fostering service undergo medical checks on an annual basis and this is recorded.

The foster carers visited were informed about health services and specialist services in the area. Evidence was provided to confirm that foster carers were given information as to their responsibilities for promoting the health of the children placed. This was recorded in the foster carers hand book and is also covered by the supporting social worker. Foster carers also supply information regarding health developments for inclusion in reviews.

The children placed have access to a Looked After Children health adviser, a community nurse, and a CAMHS worker seconded to the Looked After Children team.

Responses from the children’s questionnaire confirm that they are involved in regular activities. All foster carers continue to receive training in First Aid.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The manager of the service is suitable and strives to meet standards well.

The fostering agency generally match children to carers appropriately, but matching could be improved with more formal support for trans-cultural/ trans racial placements. In addition, producing risk assessments regarding the potential impact of a new placement on children already placed would ensure that any mismatches are more easily identified before placements start.

The fostering service does protect each child from abuse or neglect although ensuring that all the essential information about potential new placements is provided to all foster carers will further facilitate protecting other children already placed and the birth children of foster carers.

The people working in the fostering service are suitable to work with children. However, for the fostering service to do all in its power to ensure suitable staff, all foster carers must have a Criminal Record Bureau check and the two staff references required should be from different employers and different individuals.

The fostering panel is run effectively and efficiently but could take a more active role in monitoring quality, training, and monitoring exemptions to approved placement numbers and categories.

EVIDENCE:

The manager is suitably qualified and experienced and strives to meet standards well.

The staffing records for all staff were seen and it was evident that the recruitment process for staff remains clear and appropriate records are retained from the interviews. See Standard 15 below for minor shortfalls identified under recruitment.

The foster homes that were visited as a part of this inspection all comfortably accommodated children / young people who are placed and were adequately furnished and maintained to high standards of cleanliness and hygiene. The foster homes that were visited were free of hazards and foster carers confirmed that they had been provided with Health and Safety training. Foster carers' files demonstrated that foster carers' homes had undergone health and safety assessments. Foster carers had been informed that they might be interviewed as a part of the inspection process.

The last inspection report recorded the following, 'although robust procedures exist regarding matching, some limited evidence of this process not occurring within the panel's defined parameters was found for emergency and respite placements. This area will be monitored to fully assess if this was a one off or whether it represents a need for tighter procedures.'

This area was looked at in more detail at this inspection. More clarity was found this year regarding emergency and respite, however a higher number of exemptions to approved numbers and category was indicated. This is addressed with a requirement under Standard 30 for closer monitoring of exemptions by panel and by a verbal request for figures of exemptions to be provided to the Commission on a regular basis. This will now be assessed on an ongoing basis.

Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements occur, the fostering service does not have a policy or procedure to provide additional support, information and resources that was known or used by supporting social work staff. Any additional support in this area was being performed in an inconsistent manner and was based on the experience and knowledge of individual staff, which obviously varied. The following requirement is therefore set under Standard 8 to provide some consistency of support in this area:

Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements occur, the fostering service must provide the foster carers with specific additional training, support and information to facilitate developing a positive understanding of their heritage and facilitate developing the carers' skills {as required} to enable them to better meet all the child's needs. This process must be recorded.

In addition, risk assessments were not available regarding the potential impact of a new placement on children already placed and the birth children of foster carers. The following requirement is therefore also set under Standard 8 to address this:

Risk assessments must be produced, regarding the potential impact of a new placement on children already placed and the birth children of foster carers.

The Foster Carers' Handbook clearly sets out guidelines to protect children from abuse and what to do in case there was abuse.

There is a policy in place in respect of corporal punishment.

There is also a policy and protocol on children who go missing from their placement. The Handbook and the Children's Guides explain how each child has access to their Social Workers and the Child Participation Officer to discuss any concerns they have. The documentation seen by the Inspector shows that children are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews and provide a confidential written contribution. Social work staff are appropriately trained to promote and safeguard the welfare of children, which is monitored at each supervisory visit.

Some of the foster carers gave examples of where they had not been provided with all the relevant information about a new placement. This was supported in files and also the children's files where certain information was not present to enable the supervising social worker to acquire and pass on relevant information. The following requirement is set under Standard 9 to address this: The responsible individual must ensure that each foster carer is provided with all the essential information required about potential new placements so that they can protect other children placed and any of their own children.

The last inspection report contained a requirement for two references to be kept on file for all staff.

A second reference had been acquired but this one was from the same person that the previous reference had cited as being the main person they had gained the reference information from as an ex manager of the staff member concerned. The new reference was also written in the context as the same ex manager. This meets the requirement but not the spirit of the regulation concerned. As it was attempted to meet the previous requirement and technically two references are on this file, the previous requirement is considered met, however for clarity the following recommendation is now set under Standard 15;

The two staff references required should be from different employers and different individuals.

Following a suggestion in the last report, checking gaps in employment is now explored in more depth and this process is recorded to ensure that children are protected from undesirable staff.

Foster carers' files were examined and appropriate checks were in place for most carers. However one foster carer had never had a Criminal Records Bureau check. The following requirement is set under Standard 15 to address this oversight: All foster carers must have a Criminal Records Bureau check.

The following evidence of good practice has been presented and acknowledged under Standard 15:

- 1, Staff qualifications are greater than the minimum standard. The service does not have a bar on the number of senior workers and therefore is in a position to potentially have a team where all staff are senior practitioners.
- 2, The organisation uses its resources effectively with the skills of foster carers put to effective and valued use where welcomed by the carer. For example, one foster carer's I.T skills are put to effective use.

The inspectors have noted that the panel was well balanced, performed to a high professional standard, and contained key people.

The last inspection report contained a recommendation under Standard 30 for a written procedure to cover decision-making where all the members of the panel are not in agreement should be implemented. This has occurred and this requirement is now met.

Evidence from files and review minutes indicated that training of foster carers, refusal to train and exemptions to approved placement numbers and categories were not being fully monitored by the panel and were not referred to in panel minutes. It is recognised that some strategies have been put in place to address this. The following requirement is made in this report under Standard 30:

The panel's role in monitoring quality must be expanded to take into account training of foster carers {and refusal to continue training}, and monitoring of exemptions to approved placement numbers and categories.

The following evidence of good practice was presented and acknowledged under Standard 30: The panel work within the National Minimum Standards and these are reviewed against in foster carer reviews. This facilitates a good understanding of the Standards for all staff and foster carers.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The fostering service does value and generally promotes diversity. The fostering service promotes educational achievement to ensure that children placed achieve their potential. Standard 31 does not generally apply to this agency, but where it does, the difference between looked after children and respite care to maintain children with birth parents is recognised.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers receive guidance through the Foster Carers' Handbook {which is comprehensive and regularly updated}, through regular supervision sessions with the supporting social worker, and through a comprehensive training programme.

The above guidance includes issues of diversity and promoting equality and encouraging each child to develop their skills as required under this Standard.

There are foster carers on the register who provide specialist services e.g. to children who have disabilities. These carers receive extra financial support and are linked into additional community support services to ensure that these children's needs are met.

Education support is closely linked into schools. The inspectors noted good links and support from schools and the community.

The foster carers have the responsibilities to ensure that children do attend school. Any child away from school or absent is entered in their logbooks and social workers are notified.

Interviews with foster carers confirmed their attendance at school meetings.

Support and advice is available from the Looked After Children Education Adviser who all Looked After Children and foster carers have access to. Meetings are also planned with the fostering service social workers, Education Liaison Officers and children to discuss progress etc. This is discussed at children's reviews.

Comments from the children / young people, foster carers and placing officers questionnaires also confirmed that educational support is occurring. Evidence from the children's questionnaires also indicated that the children felt they were given opportunities and encouraged to take part in activities and interests.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The fostering service promotes and supports contact arrangements so that appropriate links can be maintained with birth parents.
The fostering service promotes consultation so that foster carers and children placed feel involved and listened to.

EVIDENCE:

Depending on circumstances of each child, contacts are maintained with their birth parents and supervised visits are arranged. There is guidance in the Foster Carers' Handbook about how to work with birth parents. Agreements on contact are arranged in conjunction with the placing social worker and form part of the placement agreement.

It is the fostering services' policy that contact at the foster carer's home does not occur until assessed as appropriate at the first review through the risk assessment process.

The foster carers are aware that maintaining contacts is crucial to the social welfare of the child in the future. The files show that each contact is recorded in detail.

Evidence from foster carers and questionnaires indicated that children / young people continue to be supported to maintain regular contact with their birth families where this is appropriate. Although as is to be expected, some children said they wanted more contact at this and the last inspection.

The 2003 inspection report contained a requirement for the fostering service to take further steps to ensure all children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.

In addition to existing complaints information, the service has since set up a younger children's group and interactive CD Rom for Looked After Children. Both cover complaints. Information to children and younger people is now seen as an area of good practice. See Standard 1.

Almost all of the Commission's children and younger persons' questionnaires returned recorded that the children and younger people were aware of how to make a complaint.

Feedback from the Commission's children and younger persons' questionnaires revealed that children's opinions are sought and listened to. Examples were provided regarding things that had changed as a result of being listened to. One questionnaire stated that the children should be more involved in making rules and regulations.

Children and younger people are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews and provide a confidential written contribution. Children are also consulted through the use of questionnaires, and there is a young people's forum for children placed.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

The fostering service promotes independence skills and health training to prepare younger people for adulthood.

The fostering service pays foster carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified to ensure that sufficient money is available to meet the children placed's financial needs.

EVIDENCE:

The supervising social worker addresses issues pertaining to independence throughout the fostering period with increasing emphasis as preparation for independence becomes more imminent.

When preparing for independent living, pathway plans are used with young people who are encouraged to be actively involved in decision-making processes.

Social workers also ensure that each young person preparing to move to independent or semi- independent living is consulted about his/her future.

There is training available to foster carers regarding preparing those fostered for independent living. From 16 years of age young people fostered have a bank account set up where all allowances are paid in.

The Foster Carers' Handbook gives details about the charges and allowances paid by the fostering service. This includes additional payments and allowances. The charges are agreed at the beginning of each placement and reviewed annually or sooner if there is a need for it.

Foster carers are paid every two weeks with an additional payment round at Christmas. If necessary payments can be made in advance.

Payments to foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis. The fostering service is now making payments directly into foster carers' bank accounts.

Good practice suggestions:

It is suggested only at this stage that foster carers who wish, could be provided with a more detailed breakdown of what specific payments are being made.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

There is a clear statement of aims for the service and a clear children's guide which provided accessible information to those accommodated.

The fostering service is managed well by a well experienced and appropriately qualified manager.

The fostering service is generally monitored and controlled as specified.

The fostering service has not had an adequate number of staff or foster carers to fully meet responsibilities outlined in its the Statement of Purpose.

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers although the foster carers perceive that this has been compromised by shortages of staff over the last year.

Case records for children are generally comprehensive so that most of the information needed to ensure a safe placement and good match is available.

Foster carers are generally appropriately trained but ongoing training is not as well attended and not all external training is recorded.

Administrative records are generally maintained as required to facilitate an efficient use of records in providing a service.

EVIDENCE:

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose specifically for the Fostering Care Service is available as a public document.

The following evidence of good practice was acknowledged under Standard 1:

The service has developed, in addition to the written children's guides, an interactive CD Rom for Looked After Children. This is also being further developed. The "Young Livin' "project is also available as a source of information on the internet.

The last inspection report contained a recommendation for the statement of purpose to contain the number of complaints and a break down of their outcomes. This has now occurred and the only minor shortfall in this document has therefore been addressed.

The manager has been in post for four years. The team manager also has management experience as a Senior Practitioner and assistant team leader going back to 1995.

The completed pre-inspection questionnaire indicates that the Team Manager is professionally qualified with a CQSW and a Diploma in Management Studies. The manager and her staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Staff reported that they are able to access support through well-established lines of communication and regular group team meetings and supervision.

The following evidence of good practice was acknowledged under Standard 2:

The organisation has maintained a positive staff team dynamic despite staff pressure due to vacancies over the last year.

It was identified at this inspection that no responsible individual is recorded as being registered with the Commission. The fostering service needs to have a responsible individual so that areas requiring attention that are beyond the manager's control can be addressed. The following requirement is set under Standard 2 to address this oversight.

The local authority must put forward a responsible individual for the fostering service.

This is a Local Authority run service and the Audit section monitors the finances.

Foster carer visits, files and supervising social worker interviews provided evidence that in some instances poor communication exists between one of the children's teams and the fostering team. The following requirement is now set under Standard 4 to address this:

The responsible individual must ensure that strategies are in place to improve communication between the different sections of children's services. {For example by providing information about how children should be introduced to foster carers.}

There was also evidence that one child protection investigation had been significantly delayed. Although it is recognised that it appears that responsibility for this delay lay with other agencies, clear strategies should be in place to evidence that the fostering service had done all it can to expediate the process, and challenge other agencies where required. The following requirement is also set under Standard 4 to address this:

The responsible individual must ensure that strategies are in place to progress Child Protection investigations in a timely fashion.

The foster carer recruitment has been negatively affected by a vacancy in the recruitment post for 4 months out of the last 12, and through the normal induction period of the new staff member. Although the strategies in place should improve the situation, the outcome of more foster carers leaving than new foster carers starting has created a reduced pool of foster carers. In addition, the tighter constraints in authorising the funding of placements in independent fostering agencies has further reduced the pool of usable foster carers. All foster carers spoken to stated that they felt the pressure of these shortages through increased placement pressure and increased pressure from supervising social workers to go over numbers or out of approved category. This was also supported in foster carer questionnaires and indirectly in one child's questionnaire. The following requirement is therefore set under Standard 17:

Sufficient numbers of foster carers must be employed to meet the needs of the service and children requiring placements.

Over the same 12 month period there have been consistent staff vacancies with at one point reaching 2.5 vacancies out of a possible 4 posts. Although most posts have been recruited to, an induction and bedding down period is required before new staff can be fully efficient. This situation is not helped by the current frozen post which will have a greater effect on such a small team. Feedback from all foster carers visited and some questionnaires clarified that foster carers were acutely aware of these staff shortages and felt poorly supported as a result. This may be a temporary shortfall as before these high levels of vacancies, all foster carers spoken to felt that support was an area of good practice. There was also some evidence of these staffing shortages creating an increased pressure on staff and less urgent work being postponed. For example there were two foster carers that had done no training since 2002 yet had training needs identified. The supervising social worker wrote in the training section of these carers' panel review reports: 'Not looked on this occasion.' The following requirement is set to address this staffing shortfall under Standard 17:

Sufficient numbers of supervising social workers must be maintained at all times, to ensure that the needs of the fostering service can be met in line with the statement of purpose.

All foster carers are reviewed annually. Foster carers receive regular visits and supervision. Carers who spoke with the Inspection team during visits and supporting social worker interviews confirmed that both groups had a clear understanding of their own and others' roles and responsibilities. The foster carers' files that were examined by the Inspectors were found to be satisfactory. Entries are made of meetings, supervision, training and group discussions in the foster carers' files.

Foster carer training is subject to consistent development.

The foster carers' files examined by the inspectors identified that before foster carers are approved, each carer has an opportunity to talk to existing foster carers about their experience and knowledge. A number of foster carers had undergone external training that had not been recorded in the training profiles, for example Makaton signing. In fact, no training had been recorded in this file since 2002, although much external training had occurred. The following requirement is therefore set:

The fostering service must record, monitor and verify all training undertaken by foster carers, including external training.

The following evidence of good practice was presented and acknowledged under Standard 23:

The agency provides incentives for foster carers that take up training.

There is a £25 to £30 allowance for each course attended.

There is a £500 allowance for undertaking the NVQ.

Core essential training is identified and once this is completed and a period of initial fostering has occurred a second enhanced rate of payment is offered.

The children's files examined at the time of the inspection were well organised and contained few obvious omissions. This has been addressed with a requirement under Standard 9.7 and will not be duplicated under Standard 24 here.

Foster carers visited were aware of the importance of record keeping and the need to keep records in a confidential manner. The Foster Carers' Handbook and pack contains a separate booklet regarding the foster carers' responsibilities for record keeping.

The foster care service maintains a case record for each foster child or young person in their foster care and also for the foster carers. These records were available for inspection.

The foster carer files demonstrated that entries were made of supervision visits by supporting social workers. A record of training and all panel minutes and reviews were present. These files contained all the relevant information and documentation, were organised and contained no obvious omissions.

Training and guidance are available for foster carers to support children to come to terms with previous life events. Training and support also covers the foster carer's role in the production of 'life story books'.

The records examined during the course of this inspection were found to be generally in good order. Confidential records are kept securely and safely in locked cupboards and are accessible to authorised staff only. Written entries on the files made by staff in the unit were legible and professional.

The fostering agency is subject to the local authority's Access to Files policy. There is policy and guidance regarding confidentiality.

The filing system for foster carer files was not consistent which made it difficult to find information for the inspectors and must also affect the staffs' ability to find and monitor information. In addition it may be helpful for staff to have a quiet area in the office for report writing as an open busy office is currently used. Although this area was generally good two good practice recommendations are made under Standard 25 regarding the above.

1, There should be a clearer and standardised filling system and regular file audits to facilitate consistency and quality.

2, The fostering service should explore ways to improve the office-working environment. For example a quiet room for report writing.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	2
30	3

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

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	2	5[2]c	The local authority must put forward a responsible individual for the fostering service.	01/05/06
2	4.1	42	The responsible individual must ensure that strategies are in place to improve communication between the different sections of children's services. {For example by providing information about how children should be introduced to foster carers.}	01/06/06
3	4.1	42	The responsible individual must ensure that strategies are in place to progress Child Protection investigations in a timely fashion.	01/06/06
4	8.2	17[1] +11[b]2	Where trans-racial or trans-cultural placements occur, the fostering service must provide the foster carers with specific additional training, support and information to facilitate developing a positive understanding of their heritage and facilitate developing the carers' skills {as required} to enable them to better meet all the child's needs. This process	01/02/06

			must be recorded.	
5	8,	33	Risk assessments must be produced, regarding the potential impact of a new placement on children already placed and the birth children of foster carers.	01/02/06
6	9.7	34[3] + Schedule 6	The responsible individual must ensure that each foster carer is provided with all the essential information required about potential new placements so that they can protect other children placed and any of their own children.	01/02/06
7	15.4	20 + Schedule 1	All foster carers must have a Criminal Record Bureau check.	01/02/06
8	17.1	19	Sufficient numbers of Supervising Social Workers must be maintained at all times to ensure that the needs of the fostering service in line with the statement of purpose can be met.	01/06/06
9	17.1+ 17.3	19	Sufficient numbers of Foster Carers must be employed to meet the needs of the service and children requiring placements.	01/06/06
10	23.5	17	The fostering service must record, monitor and verify all training undertaken by foster carers, including external training.	01/04/06
11	30.5	26[2]c	The panel's role in monitoring quality must be expanded to take into account training of foster carers {and refusal to continue training}, and monitoring of exemptions to approved placement numbers	01/04/06

			and categories.	
--	--	--	-----------------	--

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	15.4	The two staff references required should be from different employers and different individuals.
2	25.3	There should be a clearer and standardised filing system and regular file audits to facilitate consistency and quality.
3	26	The fostering service should explore ways to improve the office-working environment. For example a quiet room for report writing.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Croydon, Sutton & Kingston Office

8th Floor

Grosvenor House

125 High Street

Croydon

CR0 9XP

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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