



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

NCH Foster Care

**Community Placement North East
3 River Court
Brighthouse Road
Riverside Park
Middlesbrough
TS2 1RT**

Lead Inspector
Darren Hobson

Key Announced Inspection
27th November 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

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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	NCH Foster Care
Address	Community Placement North East 3 River Court Brighthouse Road Riverside Park Middlesbrough TS2 1RT
Telephone number	01642 249452
Fax number	01642 241496
Email address	
Provider Web address	www.nch.org.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	NCH
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Keith Frederick Miller
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 9th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care NCH, Community Placement North East is an independent Fostering Service operated by NCH. It is based in Brighthouse Road in Riverside Park in Middlesbrough and offers task centred foster care placements to young people aged between 8 and 17 years. The Fostering Service also has offices in Hull and Sheffield that are supporting its activities in these areas. The service aims to provide placements for those young people for whom the alternative may have been secure accommodation or specialist residential provisions as well as more mainstream fostering provision. The fostering service is, in addition, working with Durham County Council Social Services Department to provide a treatment foster care scheme for that authority.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff for the way they helped the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. The inspectors also want to thank children's social workers who filled in forms or who told him what they think of the fostering service. Staff in the fostering team, carers and children spoken to were very helpful and people spent time filling in surveys and sending them to the inspectors before the inspection. Information and facts in this report come from surveys sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers and from written information the Service Manager and Team Manager gave the inspectors, as well as from the things seen and the people spoken to when they visited. The inspectors visited two foster placements, which had a child living with them. Questionnaires were returned from eight fostered children, 18 foster carers, and 12 children's social workers.

Two inspectors spent three days with the fostering service and gathered information by:

- Talking individually with children, carers and fostering staff;
- A group meeting with foster carers
- A group meeting with staff
- Visiting two foster carer's homes;
- Reading children's, carers' and staff files;
- Reading records;
- Interviewing the Service Manager and Team Manager;
- Studying the surveys and other information sent back to him;
- Reading records of the meetings of the fostering panel.

Overall NCH fostering service is a good service. The feedback we had through questionnaires and talking directly with children, their carers and social workers was generally very positive.

What the service does well:

NCH provides stable placements for children. Its foster carers are well trained and children are carefully matched to their foster placements to make sure their needs can be met.

The service is good at doing assessments of people who want to become foster carers. It carries out the very important checks on staff and carers to make sure that they are the right sort of people to look after children, and keep them safe.

The training given to carers to help them become good carers is very good. Training in child protection and managing challenging behaviour are especially helpful in making sure that children are safe in placement.

Children's health needs are met because the service gives carers additional training in areas such as sexual health, first aid and drug awareness; plus it makes sure children attend their looked after children (LAC) medicals.

The staff are well managed and supported by the manager and deputy manager. The manager has very good systems in place to monitor the service, which makes sure that the staff and carers do their jobs properly and record the important information about children.

Support and supervision to foster carers is very good and helps make sure that children are kept safe and their placements are stable.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has managed to appoint a young person who was once looked after in foster care to be a member of the fostering panel. This means that they will be able to provide advice and experience about what it is like to be fostered, which should be very helpful to the panel when it makes its decisions about who will make good foster carers.

What they could do better:

Although assessments of foster carers are usually excellent, we found that one set of carer's went to the fostering panel without doing their 'skills to foster' training. This training is a very important part of the assessment and therefore the panel must only consider recommending carers who have completed this training before the panel meeting. Where the panel puts off its decision then the service must make sure that the case comes back to panel for a recommendation before the carers are approved by the agency decision maker. This means that the fostering panel should only recommend approval of carers when all of the information is available, which would indicate to them, that the carers will look after, support and keep children safe. It is also important that the agency decides who will be responsible for placing prospective foster carer cases on the agenda of the fostering panel, and who will take forward any action, which needs to be considered by future panels.

Some carers have not received training in countering bullying. All carers should do this training so that they can understand and identify when children are bullied.

The service should have an advisor to the Sheffield fostering panel to make sure that the services views on the assessment and how it was undertaken are given to the panel.

The service is good at making sure it does the important checks on staff before they are employed. However, it should check to see if there are any gaps in employment histories of the people it wishes to employ and look into the reasons for this. This will further help to make sure staff are the right sort of people to work with children.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency is good at promoting and caring for children's health.

EVIDENCE:

The NCH fostering service keeps good records about the health needs of and health provision to children. All carers complete a diary, which is monitored by the supervising social worker. Information about children's health is brought to the attention of the manager.

The manager has an effective system for monitoring children's health in order to ensure that any issues are dealt with. Training for carers in health issues is very good with specific training being provided to carers to meet the individual health needs or disabilities of the children placed with them. Training is also provided in first aid, drugs, sexual health and healthy eating.

Information provided by the service showed that most of the children placed through the agency on a long-term basis have had an annual Looked After Children (LAC) health check in the last 12 months. The file of the two young people case tracked during the inspection confirmed that they had received a health check and that this section of the LAC documentation was complete.

When foster carers and social workers were asked how well the service supports foster carers to meet children's health needs the responses were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	35%	55%
Good	58%	45%
Adequate	7%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers' comments included:

- "Review (young person's) health on a monthly basis at supervision."
- "Adequate training provided, first aid, drug awareness, sexual health."
- "Promote good healthy lifestyles, help build self confidence."

A social worker said:

- "Ensures all medical needs are met."

All children consulted said they 'always' get the right help and advice with their health. Children's said things like:

- "(Care's name) tells me to do healthy things and she gives me healthy food and give me advice about health."
- "My carer makes sure I eat the right sort of food. We go out for walks and trips to do exercise."

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency is good at providing children with safe homes that are well matched with their needs. Training provided to foster carers is good and assessment and recruitment of staff and carers is very thorough and contributes towards safeguarding children's welfare. The efficiency and effectiveness of the fostering panel is adequate but systems to ensure that no assessment is considered before all available evidence is provide needs further development.

EVIDENCE:

The homes of the two foster carers visited as part of this inspection were found to be comfortable and suitable environment in which to place children. Children consulted were very pleased with their home. One young person said "It's really nice here, the house is lovely."

Good health and safety checklists updated at each foster carer review were in place in the files examined and a thorough process for undertaking gas system checks, and all home and car insurance and checks necessary is in place, and these are also updated at carers' reviews.

The service has good systems for matching children to placement. Before making any placement a matching consideration form is completed by the placing authority. The forms seen during the inspection visit were comprehensively completed. Most of the placements made in the last 12 months have been planned. However, the agency is extending its services through the provision of a limited number of emergency placements, which it is able to do as most of its placements are single occupancy. Of the 18 carers who responded to the questionnaires, seven considered the agency to be excellent at providing information about children prior to placement, five reported the agency was good and four adequate. Two carers did not respond to this question. During the group meeting with eight sets of carers, all responded positively about matching arrangements. All considered that they had been appropriately matched to the children in their care. Comments included, "they give you everything they have, they don't hold anything back," and "the staff talk to you about any placement which they might have, you go to meet the child, or they come to visit you. Normally, it is all very planned". One carer said that they had experienced the breakdown of a placement because they couldn't meet the young person's needs. This, they reported, had occurred because the child's social worker did not give them or NCH important background information, which would have shown the placement to be inappropriate.

When social workers and foster carers were asked about the quality of support provided by the agency to maintain placement stability, the responses were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	60%	45%
Good	40%	45%
Adequate	0%	10%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers and social workers were also asked how well the agency supports foster carers to meet children's needs and ensure they are well cared for. The responses were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	60%	66%
Good	40%	34%
Adequate	0%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers made comments including:

- "Provide support groups and regular meetings and information and supervision. Necessary training for carers help us provide and improve the life of children we care for."
- "The agency ensures that all children in foster care are in a safe, supportive environment which should enable the children to develop their greatest potential."
- "It gives good support and matching process."
- "Excellent training provided which is paramount to any placement in conjunction with support."

Social workers all said they receive 'excellent' or 'good' information from the fostering service about children's progress. Their comments included:

- "Works well with other professionals to meet young person's needs."
- "NCH provide good support to both young people, carers and social worker. Regular progress meetings held. Assist with contacts and transport."
- "Listens to young peoples views and provides excellent training to its carers."
- "Stability of placement, good educational support."

Case tracking showed evidence of very good matching work with good information being sought from the placing authority and previous foster carers, although in once case a matching form for a young person's current placement was not available.

The manager has a good system of monitoring placements and significant events to ensure that children are being kept safe. Foster carers have good safe care policies for their home and care in place. These relate to the individual child placed and are shared with the child's own social worker. Safe caring training is provided to foster carers during their assessment and pre-approval training. Safe caring issues are discussed regularly as part of foster carers' supervision and they are supported in their development of safe care policies by their supervising social workers to ensure their awareness is up-to-date. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place to support the safe care of the child. All carers have received training in child protection and those interviewed demonstrated a sound knowledge of safeguarding procedures. Records showed that supervising social workers visit foster carers regularly with a great deal of support being noted for foster carers and fostered children in placements.

An audit of staff files confirmed that the agency has thorough staff recruitment procedures. All necessary pre-employment safeguarding checks such as an enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) disclosure are in place. It was noted, however, that gaps in employment are not always fully completed.

All young people consulted said that they are well cared for by the foster carers they live or stay with and all said they know who to speak to if they had a problem or were worried about anything. The majority of children said they would know how to make a complaint. All children who responded said that they are not being bullied.

Children's comments about being safe included:

- "I know the people I can talk to if I am not happy."
- "Of course I feel safe here it's a good place to live."
- "(Carer's name) always gives me advice about being safe" and "I know how to complain to me social work, but I would talk to (carer's name) first."
- "I get loads of support from my carer, she is great and I love her very much."

The agency's fostering panels are constituted in a way that complies with the requirements of the regulations and national minimum standards and includes people with a wide range of appropriate skills. It is pleasing to note that the service has appointed a former looked after young person to the Middlesbrough panel.

Panel minutes examined showed that the Sheffield and Middlesbrough panels have been quorate for any decisions made. However, it was noted that the advisor to the Sheffield joint panel is a local authority staff member, who would not necessarily be able to advise the panel on NCH's assessment processes undertaken. It was also noted that on one occasion the Middlesbrough panel had considered an assessment of prospective carer's who had not undertaken the 'skills to foster' training. Although the panel did not make a firm recommendation for approval, ambiguity around the minutes of the meeting, lack of clarity as to who had responsibility to bring forward and re-agenda the case, resulted in the agency's decision maker approving the carer's without the them being re-considered by panel following the completion of their 'skills to foster' training.

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 and 13

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency values diversity and children are provided with care and services that reflect their individual needs. Children are supported and assisted to get a good education.

EVIDENCE:

The agency's foster carer assessment process and initial training for prospective carers covers equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and considers their attitudes, knowledge and abilities to work with children from different backgrounds and with different needs and to promote diversity. The agency has recruited a number of black, minority and ethnic background (BME) carers. Assessments of these carers' are co-worked by a black worker who is able to advise on ethnicity and cultural issues. Discussions with carers and information within questionnaires confirmed that carers receive training in equality and diversity both as part of pre-fostering training and their continuing development.

Foster carers and social workers views about how good the service is at supporting foster carers with issues relating to diversity were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	66%	50%
Good	28%	50%
Adequate	6%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carers comments about the support provided included:

- "NCH provide training on ethnicity, culture and disability and are always on the ball with these issues."
- "Both my placements with NCH have been young people of mixed race. My support worker has been actively supporting and assisting me in finding out about skin care etc for the young people."
- "Many courses are run to outline this and the level of training in this area is of a high standard."
- "NCH couldn't achieve a higher standard as a company."

The agency monitors educational matters in relation to children using its supervision processes and gathers information about schooling for children's reviews. Foster carers' reviews also consider how well carers are helping support children's educational needs. It was evidenced that supervising social workers support carers with attending school meetings and ensuring that children are in receipt of personal education plans (PEPs). Those children whose case was tracked as part of the inspection were found to have PEPs in place. The service also produces a number of booklets about supporting and promoting children's educational attainment whilst in foster care and lifelong learning.

All young people said that they get the right sort of help with their education and those for whom it was appropriate said they are helped to think about their future. Children said things like:

- "I am always told that I can do well, and I want to do well."
- "(Carer's name) tells me to practice my handwriting and maths (times tables). She has also bought a computer, which also helps. She also helps me with my homework and checks it."

Foster carers' and social workers' views about the quality of support provided by the agency for children's education were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	70%	60%
Good	18%	40%
Adequate	12%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Views of the quality of support for activities in the community were:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	40%	45%
Good	48%	45%
Adequate	12%	10%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Foster carer's comments education and activities for children included:

- "The fostering service were closely involved in selecting an appropriate school and have been involved in regular educational progress reviews."
- "The service does do all it can to help keep young people in education, sometimes working very closely with the schools and governing bodies."
- "Additional voice to argue for SEN support and identified school."
- "When our young person was in full time education NCH supported school, young person and ourselves so that the young person received the relevant support he deserved."
- "They are always there to support and encourage young people and attend meetings at school if required."
- "They have provided computers and try and get schools on board regarding monthly progress meetings."
- "NCH are excellent in this are when needed."
- "Education is very important for transforming children and young peoples lives. NCH have support to promote and help me and school to promote and help the child/young person to achieve a good attainment level in education."

While social workers said:

- "Regular progress meetings held."
- "They do all they can to find a good school for children they place."

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children get good help to maintain contact with their families and the agency is good at communicating with children's birth families. Children's views are listened to and responded to by the agency and its carers.

EVIDENCE:

NCH fostering agency actively supports children where appropriate to maintain contact with their birth families. Guidance is available to carers within the fostering handbook. Contact is also an important aspect of training provided as part of the agency's pre-fostering training. Foster carers visited described the work they do to support and facilitate contact with their foster child's siblings. All responses made by foster carers and social workers in questionnaires described children's networks with family, friends and the community as excellent or good. Some comments made by children and young people included, "I see my dad every Wednesday and stay there on weekends" and "I can call and ring my mam anytime, she comes to see me and (Carer's name) takes me to see her."

The service works to consult with the children who use the service about the care they receive. Children for their own reviews and those of their foster carers complete children's evaluation forms. The service also requests children to complete a placement evaluation form at the end of their placement. Children told us, "They help me to think about what I want to achieve in the future and help me make wise choices", "(The agency supervising social worker) Talk to me about things. She also talks to me about my mum and she listens to me when I talk to her." All of the children and young people we spoke to or who completed questionnaires reported that they are "always" or "usually" listened to.

Foster carers' and social workers' views about how well children are involved in and consulted about their own care were as follows:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	40%	70%
Good	50%	20%
Adequate	10%	10%
Poor/Inadequate	0%	0%

Views about how good the agency is at involving the young people in how the service operates were:

	Foster Carers	Social Workers
Excellent	33%	0%
Good	50%	100%
Adequate	12%	0%
Poor/Inadequate	5%	0%

Foster carers said things about consultation with children including:

- "NCH asks the young person for feedback, however, in my experience the young person is not always forthcoming with their views/ideas."
- "Some young people just go with the flow on day to day routines. However, some young people play an active part in arrangements. This should always be encouraged."
- "Young people who have something to say should be listened to as they are sometimes best suited to identify downfalls in the service."
- "Build good relationships with the child and young people by involving them about their lives."
- "NCH involve the young people in all aspects of daily life, always ready to listen to young people."
- "The young people are always welcome at NCH. And always take on board young peoples views and opinions. Young people are encouraged to voice their opinions on how NCH is run."

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)

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Foster carers receive payments that allow them to care properly for the child placed with them.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has structured arrangements in place regarding payments to foster carers and levels of payments are very good. Payments are made timely and more than adequately support placements. The agency is currently undertaking a consultation to reduce the payments made to carers in order to become more competitively priced. Carers interviewed understood the reasoning behind this; however, many expressed their concern at the reduction in the sliding scale of payments made to carers between placements. Comments made by carers included, "I gave up a job to do this, now if they reduce the payments between placements I will have to re-consider," "They haven't really consulted us, the decision is already made, they want to reduce costs and we are taking the brunt of it," and "I can understand the reduction in weekly fees but not the sliding scale. We will lose a lot of excellent carers if they push this through."

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, 24 and 32 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, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service is good at assessing, supervising and reviewing foster carers and provides carers with very good support. Training provided to carers is very good although training in respect of countering bullying has not been provided.

EVIDENCE:

NCH is a well-managed service. Carers when asked why they chose to foster for NCH said things like:

- "I choose to foster with NCH because I have only one young person to care for. Local authorities place numerous children at once. The support I receive from NCH is excellent. My link worker (Workers name) is marvellous and supports us well."
- "They have always been there and done everything in their power for my young person and I."
- "Because they have the needs of the children and of the carers at the centre of all they do."
- "NCH promote child-centred development and are a very proactive service."
- "Mainly for the support we always have and the care for the children (children always come first)."
- "Local, independent and the manager is excellent, a real hero".

Records examined and people consulted with confirmed that foster carers receive regular 'formal' supervision as well as high levels of ongoing support. Supervision records seen were well recorded and showed that supervision of foster carers deals with the needs of the young person as well as the foster carers own support and training needs and any issues requiring attention.

Overall, the service is well staffed and provides carers with excellent support. However, difficulties in the recruitment of supervising social workers for the Middlesbrough project have led to a significant additional burden being placed on the remaining staff. As can be seen from the comments above, supervising social workers and their managers are held in high regard by the agency's foster carers. The agency has robust procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff and carers but it was noted during a check of staff personnel files that the agency does not always record reasons for gaps in employment.

Ordinarily, the quality of foster carer assessments is excellent, although one of the cases which was tracked identified that the fostering panel was requested to recommend approval of a treatment foster carer who had not undertaken the 'skills to foster' training. This training is fundamental to the assessment process, and the agency must ensure that the fostering panel before all aspects of the assessment are completed should not consider recommending prospective carers. It was also noted that the carer was approved by the agency's decision making without the case being re-considered by the fostering panel once the training was completed. The agency should also consider the need to have its own advisor to the shared Sheffield fostering panel.

Currently a local authority officer who may not have full knowledge of NCH's procedures and practice in relation to assessments undertakes this role.

The quality of training provided to carers is very good. The agency has good systems to monitor training undertaken by carers. However, training in respect of countering bullying is not currently provided. External trainers provide much of the training and carers were very positive about the training they received. They said things like:

- "NCH has to be one of the best fostering services around as the high standards of ongoing training is second to none and is always updated yearly."
- "Training is very good. Links with many external agencies."
- "Training given gives you all the skills you need. It is very good and really makes you think about your role as a carer."

The manager has excellent systems in place to monitor the functioning of the agency. Appropriate levels of administrative support is available, although it was found that recording around decisions of the fostering panel are at times unclear. It was also unclear as to who was responsible for placing cases on the agenda to be considered by the fostering panel, and where further consideration is needed who ensures that the case is carried forward to any subsequent meeting. The agency maintains appropriate records in respect of carers and children, which are securely stored. Office accommodation provides suitable working space for admin and social work staff and has meeting and training areas.

The agency has a foster carer agreement in place and these had been signed by the foster carer and agency in all situations examined. There is an appropriate statement of purpose and children's guide in place.

It became apparent at the inspection that the fostering functions, which are currently carried out by the Sheffield project will require a separate branch registration. The Sheffield office recruits, assesses, approves, supervises and supports its own carers, and finance and panel decisions are separate to the Middlesbrough agency.

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	4
9	3
15	2
30	2

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

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	X
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	4
5	3
16	3
17	2
18	X
19	3
20	X
21	2
22	4
23	2
24	3
25	3
26	3
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.	FS17	27	Only fully completed assessments in respect of foster carers which include full documentation must be considered by the fostering panel	31/12/06
2.	FS30	27 & 28	The agency decision maker must not approve prospective foster carers without a firm recommendation of the fostering panel	31/12/06
3.	FS15	20	All gaps in staff employment histories must be explained	31/03/07
4.	FS21	Section 11 Care Standards Act 2000	An application for a fostering branch must be submitted in respect of the Sheffield office	31/03/07

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.	FS30	The agency should decide who will be responsible for placing prospective foster carer cases on the agenda of the

		fostering panel, and who will take forward any action, which needs to be considered by future panels
2.	FS23	The agency should provide all foster carers with countering bullying training
3.	FS30	The agency should have its own panel advisor represented at the Sheffield joint panel

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