



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Service

Luton Borough Council Fostering Service

Housing and Social Services

Unity House

111 Stuart Street

Luton

Beds

LU1 5NP

12th to 18th January 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Luton Borough Council Fostering Service

Address

Housing and Social Services, Unity House, 111 Stuart Street, Luton, Beds, LU1 5NP

Local Authority Manager

Mr Jonathon Whalley

Tel No:

01582 546000

Address

Housing and Social Services, Unity House, 111 Stuart Street, Luton, Beds, LU1 5NP

Fax No:

01582 547215

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

Date of last inspection

19/1/04

Date of Inspection Visit		12 th to 18 th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Ms Fiona Mackirdy	079465
Name of Inspector	2	Mrs Sally Snelson	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mrs Lynne Howells, Mr Lionel Boyce	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Luton Borough Council Fostering Service. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Fostering Service Team is part of the Children and Families Division of the Housing and Social Services Department and is based in Unity House in the centre of Luton.

The service recruits, trains and supports foster carers and at the time of inspection had 117 general carers, 35 shared carers, 23 carers for specific children and 22 kinship carers. In total these carers were supporting 220 children and young people.

Within this, the service was offering a range of types of foster care including emergency placements, short term or bridging placements, longer term placements, including permanent placements, shared care and short breaks for disabled children, preparing for independence placements, mother and baby placements and one contract care placement.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This inspection took place on 5 days between 12th and 18th January 2005. The inspection consisted of meeting with managers, staff, foster carers and children as well as looking at records, tracking the cases of eight carers and the children placed with them and sending postal surveys to children, carers and placing social workers. Responses were received from 28 children, 18 foster carers and placing officers in respect of 64 placements.

Only identified key standards were inspected on this occasion together with progress towards meeting previous statutory requirements. The inspectors were Fiona Mackirdy and Sally Snelson.

The inspectors found that the fostering service had continued to develop and improve and was offering a good standard of foster care to children in placement. Most of the national minimum standards were met or almost met. There were plans in place to develop the service in those areas where the national minimum standards were not fully met.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

The one standard assessed was met.

Since the last inspection the Authority had finalised and distributed the Children's Guide to fostering, which had been written and produced by a group of looked after young people with the support of the authority and local independent projects for children. The statement of purpose was not inspected on this occasion.

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

The one standard assessed was met.

The fostering service was managed on a day-to-day basis by one full-time and one part-time operational manager, both of whom were experienced in family placement matters.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

Neither of the two standards were assessed.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Six of the nine standards assessed were met.

There was a range of evidence that children were appropriately cared for and that outcomes for them were positive. The service had recruited carers from a range of backgrounds and it was clear from speaking with carers, social workers and children, that they understood their role in promoting the well-being of children, including their health and education needs. The service continued to have difficulty matching the needs of children with carers who had vacancies at the time a placement was needed. The service needed to improve the recording of how placement decisions were made, including the support needed to compensate for gaps in the match.

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

Four of the seven standards assessed were met.

The inspectors found that the service had robust recruitment procedures for new staff and carers, although was reminded that CRB checks were not portable. Generally, carers reported that they were satisfied with the level of support they received from the fostering service. Since the last inspection the service had developed a structured programme of training for carers, which would be related to their experience and the needs of children placed. This was to be implemented in the coming year and the inspectors will look forward to seeing the results of this in future inspections.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Neither of the 2 standards assessed were met.

Finding were as at the last inspection: 'The inspectors found that while recording systems in the fostering service were generally in order, a central record of complaints was incomplete. Children's records were kept within the child-care teams. Whilst these were mostly of an acceptable standard, in some files LAC documents were incomplete, unsigned or had not been recently updated.'

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

This standard was not assessed.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

These standards were not assessed.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

The one standard assessed was met.

The fostering panel was appropriately constituted, was meeting monthly and had been quorate on all occasions. The panel was fulfilling its statutory duties and there was appropriate recording of decisions made.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

This standard was not assessed.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

The one standard assessed was not met.

Since the last inspection the service had continued to take account of children's pre-existing relationships and make placements with friends and family where appropriate. The fostering service had made significant progress in completing assessments in a timely fashion, although there still remained problems with the time taken by other teams to refer these assessments to the fostering service.

The inspectors would like to thank staff, foster carers and young people for the help and time they gave to this inspection.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Following the Health and Social Care Act notices are no longer made under S47 of the Care Standards Act.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Fiona Mackirdy **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Sally Snelson **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager Colin Bowker **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	12(2)	FS4FS9FS 25	The fostering service provider must keep accurate records of all complaints and allegations about foster carers and the fostering service and ensure that copies of this information are stored on individual files as appropriate (original timescale of 30/4/04 not met)	30 April 2005
2	34(3)	FS8FS12F S24	The fostering service provider must ensure that placement agreements contain all the information listed in Schedule 6 and are signed (previous requirement not met)	On receipt of this report and ongoing
3	12	FS8	The fostering service provider must ensure that where the number of children in placement exceeds the usual fostering limit that this is in the best interests of all children and appropriate exemptions are made	At all times
4	20	FS15	The fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering service undertakes enhanced CRB checks on all adults having regular contact with children in foster placements	28 February 2005
5	17	FS22	The fostering service provider must review and update the foster carers handbook	30 June 2005

6	38	FS32	The fostering service provider must ensure that where children are placed under Regulation 38 (kinship placements) that the carers and accommodation are assessed in accordance with this regulation, that a written agreement is entered into and that the placement does not exceed six weeks (original timescale not met)	At all times
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GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS4	The fostering service provider should establish a system for monitoring and improving the fostering service in accordance with Regulation 42
2	FS4	The fostering service provider should establish a system for making notifications in line with Regulation 43
3	FS6	The fostering service provider should ensure that regular visits to foster carers take place and that comprehensive records of these visits are kept
4	FS6	The fostering service should ensure that referrals for placements, including risk assessments are kept on the foster carers files
5	FS7 FS8	The fostering service provider should ensure that written foster placement agreements contains specific reference to elements of matching which are taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	10
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	12/01/05
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	75

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Since the last inspection the Authority had finalised and distributed the Children's Guide to fostering, which had been written and produced by a group of looked after young people with the support of the authority and local independent projects for children.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	3
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Procedures relating to the recruitment of the managers were robust with evidence of checks and qualifications retained on file.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed on this occasion. However since the last inspection there was clear evidence that the two foster placement managers had clarified their individual roles.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The service had introduced structured supervisory visits, which were planned to take place at least three times a year, in between routine home visits. These supervisory visits looked in detail at the accommodation, health and safety issues and the standard of care provided. However, some files indicated that carers had not received supervisory visits for some time. The annual reviews of carers' approval was very thorough and included a manager's visit to the carer to look at a range of issues including health and safety. There was evidence that the service effectively monitored the standard of care provided and took action promptly as necessary if concerns were raised about the care of children in placement. Placement referral forms enabled the service to consider the needs of the child comprehensively prior to placing. It also incorporated a detailed risk assessment in relation to the child and a potential placement. It was not evident in every file. The foster carers that spoke to the inspectors were fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to health and safety.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Carers had been recruited from a range of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The inspectors were aware that it was not always possible to match children to carers in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin language or culture. Where a perfect match was not possible the service should identify the shortfalls immediately the placement is made and work with the child's social worker to ensure that these gaps are identified and appropriately supported.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The service continued to successfully recruit carers and had a system for prioritising applications from potential carers according to the needs of children currently awaiting placement. However, due to the continued numbers and types of placements needed the service still had difficulty at times matching the child's needs with the carers available, particularly where a placement was needed at short notice. Files did not contain information about why a particular placement was made. The inspectors recommended that the placement agreement form and LAC documents be reviewed to include elements of matching considered and the action required to compensate for any gaps in the match. The inspectors noted that the number of children in some placement exceeded the usual fostering limit and that the exemptions to this required by law had not always been made.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The service had explicit policies in relation to corporal punishment and all carers understood that there was no situation where this was acceptable. Carers had received some training on abuse and safe caring during their initial training before approval. Carers were required to develop a safe-caring policy, usually as part of the annual review process and expected to undertake training in safe caring within the first two years following their approval. The service must ensure that sufficient courses are made available to enable carers to complete this within the expected timescale.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

From the carers visited and files seen it was clear that the majority of contact was being risk assessed and usually took place in a family centre where supervision could be provided as appropriate. Carers were clear about their role in maintaining and developing family contacts and friendships. There was evidence that, where possible, children remained in the same school to maintain friendships and stability. In one case that the inspectors tracked the family placement team had appropriately passed on a complaint from a young person about lack of social work support to maintain contact.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The service had links with an independent Children's Rights Officer and other advocacy services who supported young people with a range of advocacy and development projects. Some young people had been asked to prepare the children's guide to the fostering service and had also worked on a guide about making complaints. Also, three young people had developed a satisfaction questionnaire about fostering. Carers spoke positively of the 'children who foster' group which arranged events and activities for the children of foster carers. The service had produced a format for seeking the views of children placed with foster carers and for the views of carers' own children about fostering, which were being used successfully during the review of carers' approval.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

The findings of the inspector were as reported from the previous inspection: 'There were clear procedures and expectations of foster carers to support children to attend appointments and keep records of outcomes. These were checked during supervising social workers visits. The inspectors noted that few LAC documents had been completed with full details of children's health records or signed to confirm consent for medical treatment. There was evidence of good liaison between the local authority and the health care trust, enabling support from health professionals and training for carers.' The fostering service should consider producing its own placement agreement form which contains all the required information and is appropriately signed and dated by all parties.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The local authority placed a high priority on supporting children's educational needs and foster carers were made very aware of their responsibility to help young people with school and education. The information management systems of the authority provided good information about the educational attainment of children looked after and the authority had an annual award scheme to recognise children's achievements, including attendance and effort. The allowances paid to carers took account of one-off expenditure on school uniform and equipment.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Foster carers who had been approved for placements of older children understood their role in supporting them to become independent. The 16+ team had developed written standards for enabling young people to gain skills in independent living supported by their carers.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A sample of personnel files were inspected. The local authority was operating robust recruitment procedures for new staff and all staff had undergone a criminal records bureau check. The checks undertaken for foster carers were also thorough although, the service was reminded that disclosures from previous jobs or undertaken for purposes other than fostering were not acceptable. Similarly the service must ensure that checks on regular adult visitors to foster homes are undertaken promptly. There was appropriate support for unqualified workers undertaking social work tasks and all assessments of new carers were done by qualified social workers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

22

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

1

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Since the last inspection the service had recruited to vacant posts and those being covered by agency workers. As a result all foster carers now had an allocated social worker. Staff had a range of experience and backgrounds although the fostering service acknowledged that some had limited experience of family placement matters. However there was evidence that they were being provided with appropriate support and training to develop those skills. Since the last inspection the service had recruited a dedicated referrals officer who co-ordinated enquiries from prospective carers and undertook the initial work to complete a very basic assessment and to provide full information about fostering. Assessments of new carers followed a clear process, based on completion of the BAAF Form F, including assessment of competencies to foster. All staff had received training in competency based assessment.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
<p>This standard was not assessed on this occasion.</p>		

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Since the last inspection the staff appraisal system had been implemented although appraisals for some staff were still outstanding. Staff told the inspectors that their training needs were regularly considered during supervision and that they were offered a range of training appropriate to their needs. There was evidence that new staff to the service had been provided with key training including a structured induction, child protection training and the legislative framework.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

All staff had job descriptions and contracts, outlining their role and responsibilities. Staff confirmed that they felt very well supported through informal support but staff commented and inspectors noted that a number of supervision sessions had been cancelled for a variety of reasons; these sessions had not always been rearranged. Team meetings took place fortnightly and there was evidence that all staff had the opportunity to contribute at this time.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Carers were fully aware of the support that they could expect from the fostering service and understood the different roles of their supervising social worker and the child's social worker. Carers were being supported by regular visits, including more structured supervisory visits three times a year. Responses to the postal survey of foster carers indicated that the majority of carers were positive about the support they received from the fostering service although some commented negatively about the length of time assessments took. Since the last inspection the arrangements for out of hours support had changed so that the fostering service now provided this support. Carers were also supported by their peers; a buddy scheme offered support for new carers and most foster carers had well-developed support networks. The foster carer's handbook gave written information about support services available, including assistance with children's health and education, although the fostering service acknowledged that this handbook needed to be reviewed and updated. The family placement team were in an adjacent office to most of the children's social work teams, which enabled good systems of communication.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Carers all had an allocated worker within the fostering service who provided information and support. The manual for foster carers provided comprehensive information on the policies and expectations of the fostering service, although this now needed reviewing and updating. Following approval, all carers had to sign a foster care agreement, which met the requirements of Schedule 5. The service had implemented a formal structure for some supervisory visits. There did not appear to be any structure to some of those visits that took place between supervisory visits. Unannounced visits were taking place at least once a year. Carers reported being paid on time for regular care but sometimes having to wait for extra payments; particularly for respite, shared care or day care placements.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Since the last inspection the inspectors were aware that there was a shorter time-scale from an initial enquiry about fostering to prospective carers being offered a place on a choosing to foster course. New carers spoke highly of the standard and delivery of the course. There was an on-going programme of training offered at regular intervals to carers. Those carers spoken to by the inspectors had an expectation that they were required to attend a minimum of two training events per year. The children who foster group provided support and information for the children of foster carers. There was evidence that training was reviewed annually at the foster carers' review.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The findings were as at the previous inspection:

'Inspectors found that recording in children's files was generally acceptable. However, as found at last year's inspection, some LAC documentation was not completed in sufficient detail to be an effective record for the purposes of the fostering service and some computer-generated records remained unsigned. Foster carers had been given verbal information about the purpose of the placement and why the child was in foster care, but this was not always supported by written information, as placement plans were not always fully completed. Some carers were keeping a diary of the day-to-day lives and significant events of the children, as recommended by the service, but not all carers had yet received a diary for this year.'

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

All carer's files seen were in very good order. Records were stored in locked cupboards. The provider had clear policies for case recording, confidentiality and client access to records. A central record of complaints was kept but this did not always indicate how a complaint had been investigated, whether the complaint was upheld or the outcome.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:

220

Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:

283

Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:

293

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:

22

Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:

30

Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £

134.64

Maximum £

248.88

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The foster panel was chaired by an independent social worker with over 20 years experience, of which many years had been spent in fostering and adoption. The panel members included representatives from education and health services, independent representatives, a foster carer from another fostering service provider and an elected member of the council. The panel chair was liaising with the fostering service managers concerning the quality of information presented to panel. The procedures for the operation of the panel were not inspected on this occasion.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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This standard was not assessed on this occasion.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The number of carers approved to look after the children of family and friends had continued to increase over the last year. The fostering service had developed protocols for the assessment of these placements and there was evidence that they strived to complete the required assessment of carers within the six-week timescale required by the regulations. There was evidence that kinship carers were being taken to the fostering panel for consideration prior to a full assessment being completed. However, the inspectors identified that some placements made or referred to the social work assessment teams were not passed on to the fostering service promptly, resulting in a delay to assessments being started. The fostering service had developed a written policy for training which included core courses that carers would be expected to attend.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

There was no lay assessor involved in this inspection.

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 12th to 18th January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

No response was received from the provider

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan within 28 days of the enclosed letter, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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