



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Oxfordshire County Council Fostering Service**

**Yarnton House  
Rutten Lane  
Yarnton  
Oxford  
OX5 1LP**

*Lead Inspector*  
Carole Moore

*Announced Inspection*  
13th January 2006      09:30

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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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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](http://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](http://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

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Sarah Clayson
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service
<b>No. of places registered (if applicable)</b>	0
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection** 10th February 2005

### Brief Description of the Service:

Oxfordshire Family Placements Service currently provides services in relation to both adoption and fostering. This service is soon to be split into two teams but will continue to be managed by one service manager.

This service comprises three geographically based family placement teams (over four sites), a county wide family placement team for children with disabilities and a county wide placement support team. A unit manager leads each of these teams and a recruitment officer, fostering panels and an advisor to the panels further support the service.

The disability family placement team is part of the Directorate's disability service for children and young people, and is managed by the disability service manager. That team does, however, apply the same standards as the wider fostering service and is party to its development work. The placements service manager manages the teams that constitute the family placement service.

The following fostering services are provided:

- Recruitment, preparation, assessment, training and support of carers.
- Preparation and support groups.
- Training for carers including NVQ and NVQ Assessor Awards.
- Training for staff including student placements and Child Care Award.
- Placement finding for all children and young people, including disabled children
- Relief placements.
- Short-term placements.
- Long-term placements.
- Emergency placements.
- Short breaks for disabled children and young people.
- Parent and child placements.
- Fostering Plus - a fee paid service for foster carers who accept children and young people with challenging behaviour.
- Assessments for courts, including Residence Orders.
- Placement Support.

As of December 2005, the fostering service was supporting 307 carers who offered a total of 468 placements.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over eight days in January/February 2006 and was the fourth inspection against the National Minimum Standards since the introduction of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, children in placement and placing officers in advance of the inspection. The inspector received responses from 14 young people in placement, 14 foster carers and 29 placing social workers. The manager completed a pre-inspection questionnaire and a self-assessment form and sent the inspector key documentation.

The inspectors visited seven foster carers and spoke with children in placement. Interviews took place with the director, the service manager, the team managers, carer co-ordinators, several link workers and children's social workers, the recruitment officer, the liaison nurse, the educational psychologist, the service manager for children's mental health, an elected member of the council and the panel chair. A follow up telephone conversation also took place with foster carers following the return of their surveys.

The inspectors also sat in on Foster Support, groups, a foster carers' preparation group and the placement matters meeting and observed the fostering panel.

A sample of children's/young people's case records, foster carer records, staff recruitment records and other systems, policies and procedures were looked at.

A number of requirements and good practice recommendations had been made at the previous inspection in February 2005 and it was very positive to find that a great deal of hard work has gone into implementing and improving systems and practice.

Overall the inspectors felt the fostering service was of a good quality, providing suitable placements for a wide range of young people who were well supported by an experienced and dedicated staff team.

The inspectors would like to thank the children and young people, foster carers and all staff for contributing to and assisting with the inspection process.

## **What the service does well:**

The fostering service is well managed, proactive and has an experienced and committed staff team that works well with carers.

There is good retention of foster carers.

There are four carer co-ordinators who work closely with team managers and the recruitment officer. They also contribute to the advisory surgeries and support groups that take place, offering advice and support to foster carers.

The health and education needs of the children and young people in foster placements are looked after well and there is good liaison with the other services that promote the health and educational attainment of young people.

There is a good rapport with the independent sector.

There is a very enthusiastic but small team who wish to further develop the kinship care initiative.

The placement matters team meeting is a good forum for a multi-disciplinary approach to considering requests for a placement, discussing alternatives to making such placements and ensuring that a course of action takes place.

Consultation with children and young people is regularly promoted. The "Sounding Board" gives children and young people the opportunity to be heard.

The fostering service provides an informative and useful newsletter to all carers.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

A strong feature of this service is its willingness to continue to develop and improve its systems and practice and a number of improvements have been made since the last inspection.

The service manager is keen to reshape the fostering service when the restructuring of the fostering and adoption teams takes place this year.

The recruitment procedures for staff have improved.

Three additional link worker posts have been created and there is now an extra worker in each of the three fostering teams.

There is a new service, the primary mental health team, whose objective is that no looked after child will have to wait for specialist mental health care.

The statement of purpose has been reviewed and updated.

The fostering service now ensures that each panel has an elected member of the local authority.

There is a clear audit system in place to ensure consistency of records across the three fostering teams. Senior management is also party to regular monitoring of records.

A booklet has been produced entitled 'Promoting Equality and Social Inclusion' to address the cultural differences within Oxfordshire. This is in its early stages and a working group has been identified to further develop this guide.

Carers confirmed that they are now expected to record all contact arrangements and to record the outcome of such contacts.

Administrative staff who have access to confidential information are subject to the standard level of a criminal record bureau check.

There is a new steering group to look at recruiting more parent and child foster carers.

There are now two break time contract carers who can provide short breaks 200 nights a year to those families who look after children with complex needs.

### **What they could do better:**

The recruitment of a range of diverse carers will provide the local authority with more choice and improve the overall matching of children to placements.

The health and safety checklist could be improved to allow more space for staff to adequately record their views on the safety of the home and to record actions needed to be taken, with the outcomes clearly defined.

There are still some gaps in the signing of foster carers' agreements.

Information on foster carers files need to be as specified in Schedule 3.

When auditing the foster carers files, it would be helpful if management could ensure that they fully review the clearance status for all responsible persons living or staying at the foster home address.

Training for foster carers should be actively encouraged and more clearly evidenced by way of appropriate recording in the foster carers' case files.



The fostering service must ensure that the information held on the foster carers' register meets the regulatory requirements.

Panel members' records did not meet the full requirements of Schedule 1. There were gaps in evidence of qualifications and more appropriate written references could have been sought. It might be useful to redevelop the application form.

It might be useful to appoint someone to work exclusively with enquiries from potential foster carers.

It would be helpful if there were some guidance for staff on what appears on the profiles of children that are easily available in the public domain.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# 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

### 12

The foster carers positively promote the overall health and development of children/young people with good support from the fostering service.

### EVIDENCE:

The children who completed the questionnaires showed a good understanding of what they needed to stay healthy and gave examples of how their foster carers helped them to do this - "eating healthy food", "fruit and yoghurts in my lunch box", "walk a lot", "Keep clean and tidy", "I do a lot of sport", "I have a shower every day".

The foster carers interviewed by the inspectors were all very clear on their roles and responsibilities in order to promote the health and development of the children in their care.

One carer showed a good understanding of the health issues of one child and worked really hard to ensure that the child was being seen by the consultant paediatrician.

Another carer was proactive in ensuring that the child had access to the mental health services.

All carers spoke highly of the support and advice provided by the Attach Team, when a foster child may be experiencing difficulties in their relationships or displaying difficult behaviours. This service can be accessed by the carers direct, and information about the team is provided in the statement of purpose.

An inspector spoke with the health liaison nurse who is responsible for ensuring that all children/young people placed with foster carers have up to date health assessments. The health liaison nurse has implemented new systems to ensure that accurate records are maintained on every child, whether they are placed in or out of county. She is also responsible for ensuring that the children have approved dental services.

The children and carers spoken with said the children/young people were registered with healthcare professionals and had their statutory health assessment. All visits to GPs or other medical services are clearly recorded by the carer in their diaries and medical information is updated at the regular statutory reviews that are held on the child.

Most of the files inspected had clear health records before the child was placed with the foster carers and foster carers reported that they were generally given enough information about the child or young person by the placing social worker.

The inspector also met with the newly appointed service manager for primary child and mental health services, which is a new post half funded by health. This new service started in January 2006 and is a preventative initiative to offer an immediate service to all looked after children who are experiencing emotional difficulties. The aim of this service is to offer workers support, advice and consultation in order for them to work directly with the child. Early intervention is crucial and if the child/young person requires more specialist input, the service will facilitate access to the specialist CAMHS team.

There are many training opportunities for foster carers to promote the health and development of the children in their care and these are outlined in the training booklet which is given to foster carers, for example child development, sexual health, first aid and any issues surrounding mental health.

# 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**

### **3,6,8,9,15 &30**

The fostering service has systems in place to ensure that children/young people placed are kept safe.

There need to be more vigilant checks in relation to recruitment of panel members.

The terms of foster carers' approval need to be consistent with proposed placements.

Matching could be further improved by having a wider range of foster carers.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The service manager is now back in her post full-time and is able to fully concentrate on improving the overall systems of the service and to concentrate on the new restructuring of the service.

The questionnaires received from foster carers and those spoken to were mostly complimentary about the staff and the service in general. This was very much localised to the south of the county. There appeared to be some dissatisfaction in the north of the county, but this is to be addressed by the carer co-ordinator in discussion with the manager, link workers and child's social worker.

Link workers were seen to be accessible, knowledgeable and really supportive. Foster carers are visited regularly and confirmed that communication generally was good.

The inspector interviewed several workers who demonstrated a commitment to providing a good service for both foster carers and the children/young people they looked after.

The inspectors visited the homes of seven foster carers. All were seen to be warm, comfortable, well maintained and suitable for the children living there. The health and safety checks are completed as part of the assessment process and then reviewed on a regular basis. These health and safety checklists are still tick boxes with no added space to record comments and staff have indicated that they would find it helpful to have revised forms allowing space to write their comments and to note any work that needed to be done by the foster carers to improve health and safety.

Carers confirmed that they received health and safety training and that they had relevant information in their foster carer handbooks.

Through meeting the foster carers and children placed with them, it was apparent that the carers were in a position to either meet the identified needs of the child or support the child/children in having needs addressed within a secure placement. There is a comprehensive placement request form, which informs and enables the matching process. In discussion with both the manager and staff it was clear that serious consideration is given to the matching process but, due to a lack of carers, this is not always possible. This was also evidenced at the placement matters meeting, which is held weekly. This meeting highlights the skills and experience of carers and it also highlighted that the team knew their carers well and it was a good forum to discuss placement alternatives. This meeting is to be commended.

From reports presented to panel, it was noted that several placements had been made outside of the approval categories. Foster carers who had been approved to provide relief care for a child aged between 5-12 years had received six placements during their first year and three of those had been for a young person aged 14 years. Similarly, foster carers who had been approved to provide relief care for a child from 0-10 years had received four placements, three of which had been for children aged 12, 13 and 16 years of age.

Foster carers confirmed that they had received training in child protection and that they had found this useful. The training booklet confirms that training in child protection is an important aspect of the carers' role and that this training is mandatory.

Fosters carers also receive training in managing difficult behaviour. It is further recommended that refresher training take place in relation to the very challenging behaviour that young people may present; carers particularly need to have a variety of approaches which will help to keep both the young person and themselves safe.

Staff recruitment records were sampled and found to be of a good standard. Clarification was given to the human resources department about the need to keep the full CRB check until after the next CSCI inspection for the service concerned.

There were some gaps in the recruitment records of panel members; two records were inspected relating to two panel members appointed since the last inspection. There was no documentary evidence of qualifications, some gaps in the history of employment and more relevant references could have been sought. It is suggested that a new application form be developed to ensure that the records meet the full requirements of Schedule 1.

Previous inspections have observed the local authority's joint panel considering fostering and adoption matters. From January 2006 these panels have been set up independently and the inspector observed the first fostering panel. The experienced panel chair has recruited well to meet the requirements of the panel composition. New panel members reported that they had been very well supported in preparation for their roles and had received training and a panel member's pack of information such as the BAAF publication 'Effective Panels', panel policy, details of a 'buddy' scheme, procedures for appraisal of panel members, list of panel members, allowances and the membership agreement.

Initial training for the new panel had taken place and a training programme for the year has been devised covering topics such as preparation and approval of foster carers, kinship care, promoting good race relations, making permanent placements work, attachment, child protection and an introduction to child care legislation.

An inspector observed the panel discussions and decision-making progress in making recommendations with regard to the approval of foster carers. The local authority plans to involve foster carers in attending the panel in the near future and training and role-plays were discussed to help in preparing for this development.

The panel chair collates information and statistics to look at quality assurance issues. It is expected that the new directorate will create improved systems that link with other statistics held by different departments to provide more comprehensive management information in relation to children and young people who are 'Looked After' by the local authority.

# 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**

### **7, 13 & 31**

The fostering service encourages foster carers to provide children and young people with a range of experiences to enable them to make positive, informed choices.

Particular attention is paid to the needs of children with complex needs.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Those children seen during the inspection and responses from the surveys verified that they were encouraged to develop and pursue their hobbies and interests.

The children and young people gave examples of a number of activities that they do such as swimming, tennis, football, rugby, computer games, music and riding a bike.

In the summer of 2005 there was a summer arts project at Hillend Camp where 65 children and young people took part in a residential week, ending with a show on the final night. Feedback was extremely positive from carers and children/young people.

The agency's policies demonstrate a commitment to valuing diversity and this was evidenced from the information in foster carers' files.



The agency has been successful in recruiting some carers from diverse backgrounds in order to offer a range of carers that can respect and preserve each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. An inspector visited a fairly new carer who was able to provide placements for two children from the same cultural background and she was able to provide these children with the appropriate care in tune with their cultural needs.

A lot of hard work has gone into the implementation of a guide to culture and faiths in Oxfordshire and the aim of this guide is to provide useful information to support staff in ensuring that fostering is managed in a non discriminatory manner. The service manager is keen to further develop this guide and this is currently in hand.

Those carers visited were able to give clear examples of how they support and encourage the children and young people with their educational needs. This was further evidenced at a Foster Plus support meeting where the educational psychologist was present. She provides regular input to established foster carer groups and is able to offer advice on behavioural strategies, discussing difficulties children can have at school, providing information about how children's special educational needs are addressed and offering support and advice to carers in order to empower them to communicate with the education department.

The carers were also pleased with the support of the "Reach Up Team" as they raise the educational achievement of looked after children and young people in a variety of ways. One young person was provided with extra French lessons before entering secondary school. The Reach Up Team also assisted with extra help through the crucial GCSE period.

Children and young people reported in their questionnaires that they get help from their foster carers in the following way - lots of help with GCSEs, help with homework, encouragement to do my best, attending meetings at school.

The evidence through the reading of children's files demonstrated the commitment of carers towards education and the importance of personal education plans and the reviewing of these plans.

The core work of the children's disability team is the Breaktime Scheme which provides relief for both the child/young person and their families. A dedicated team recruit, support and co-ordinate this much-needed aspect of the service. The matching of children is of utmost importance and the inspector evidenced this when visiting a relatively new carer who praised the department for the way the initial introductions were carried out. These new carers confirmed the training they had received and additional help from the occupational therapist. They also showed the inspector the Welcome Handbook they had put together in readiness for the young person.

# **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**

### **10 & 11**

Children are listened to and their opinions sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life.

Contact with family is encouraged whenever possible.

### **EVIDENCE:**

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

There are clear procedures for foster carers to follow in their foster carer handbooks and the views of the child/young person are sought in determining the contact arrangements.

Carers spoken to during the inspection gave examples about how contact was managed to ensure that it was a positive experience for the young person, and questionnaires returned also confirmed this. Some contact took place in the foster carer's home; others accompanied the young person to a neutral venue. There was a particular problem highlighted during the inspection in relation to some complex contact arrangements where, owing to a lack of communication between the child's social worker and the carer, two carers and the child were not kept informed as to when contact was to take place. The authority does work hard to ensure that the detailed arrangements for contact and any cancellations or alterations are communicated to foster carers and on this occasion this had not happened. This has been addressed with the management team.

Carers are now clear that contact arrangements are clearly recorded in their diaries and the outcomes of these contacts.

Placing officers confirmed in their questionnaires that the carers worked closely with the child's family where appropriate.

Responses made in the young people's questionnaires indicated that their carers asked them about their views. Discussion with carers and link workers indicated that carers were keen to obtain the young person's views on daily living. Children/young people said that they were asked their opinion on food, clothes, school and leisure activities.

The fostering service creates many opportunities to seek the views of children and young people in their care through their review system, end of placement meetings and through their complaints procedures.

Young people are also consulted about a variety of issues through activities such as Hillend and other group projects run throughout the year, and they are actively encouraged to discuss any ideas about changes they might like to make to the service. The fostering service is to be commended for their proactive approach in listening to children/young people.

# 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**

### **14 & 29**

Young people are supported through the transition into adulthood.

Foster carers receive clear information regarding the payment of expenses and allowances.

### **EVIDENCE:**

There is a clear written policy in the foster carer's handbook and in the Statement of Purpose in relation to allowances and expenses.

Every aspect of the child's allowances is detailed in the policy and carers spoken to confirmed that they were paid promptly and on time.

The fostering service ensures that their foster carers are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary for the transition into adulthood for young people in their care. The leaving care team ran a series of six sessions through September 2005 to March 2006 covering all aspects of leaving care and everything a foster carer would need to know to support their young person into independence.

A young person seen in placement confirmed that the placement was a positive one and that she felt well supported by the fostering service. However, she was unclear about her pathway plan and told the inspector that it had not been updated since she had changed her career plans.

Another 17 year old responded to the questionnaire positively in most areas but did identify that there were some gaps in his support through his AS levels.

# 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**

**1, 2, 4, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25 & 32**

The agency has effective systems and experienced qualified staff in place for supporting and working with carers but management of a variety of records needs to be more robustly monitored.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Statement of Purpose for the service was reviewed and updated in December 2005 and reflects the number of foster carers and employment of new staff.

There is a solid, stable and effective management structure in place and the service manager returned to her post in March 2005, having undertaken a review of residential services.

The Children, Young People and Families Directorate has merged with Learning and Culture and there is to be a split between fostering and adoption so that currently staff are undergoing major changes within the department. Three new posts have been created and appointments have been made in each of the three family placement teams.

There has been the appointment of a temporary administrator and she has taken responsibility for keeping the registers of both foster carers and children up to date. The foster carers' register is kept electronically and, when inspected, there were some gaps and errors found. The register does not keep all of the required details, and as there are gaps and some duplication it cannot be considered an accurate record.

The service manager is currently auditing all systems to ensure consistency in records across the teams. The inspectors evidenced that managers and the service manager had audited the files that were examined. There were clear audit sheets at the front of the files seen. It has been recommended that, when auditing files, management ensure that they fully review the clearance status for all responsible persons living or staying at the foster home address.

The inspector looked at a variety of foster carers and children's/young people's files and there was good evidence of LAC documentation in place, risk assessments, care plans and supervision notes, and they were mostly well maintained and well written.

An inspector viewed the 'Be My Parent' folder in the city office and looked on the website and was surprised at the content in the profile of the child/young person. It has been recommended that guidance is developed for staff on what appears on the profiles of children that are easily available in the public domain.

The link workers interviewed demonstrated a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles and all confirmed that they are provided with regular further training opportunities. Staff also confirmed that they felt fully supported in their roles.

There is a recruitment officer who has confirmed that there has been a considerable increase in the number of enquiries from potential foster carers, but this has not converted into substantially more carers being approved. Enquiries are dealt with on a duty rota basis alongside requests for placements and therefore it is not one person whose job it is to respond to enquiries. It might be helpful if consideration is given to appointing a worker to deal with enquiries from potential foster carers. A prospective carer at the preparation group that the inspector attended also highlighted this possible deficit. It had taken some time for someone to get back to her about her initial enquiry.

Recruitment features in the Autumn/Winter newsletter, thanking carers for their contribution to the recruitment campaign.

The fostering service uses experienced foster carers called 'Carer co-ordinators' who give individual and group support to carers. In addition they are actively involved in recruitment processes and preparation groups. They also take part in organising local surgeries where a variety of professionals will be present to discuss any issues that carers want to address. This has worked incredibly well in the south of the county and an inspector evidenced this when attending two support groups in Abingdon.

The foster carers visited and the questionnaires returned were mostly full of praise for the support from their link workers. However, there was some dissatisfaction expressed from carers in the north of the county and in discussion with the carer co-ordinator this is being addressed by encouraging carers to attend surgeries and support meetings.

In September 2005 the first Fostering Forum was held and views were sought from foster carers on helping Oxfordshire to reshape future services.

All foster carers have a named supervising social worker who meets with them on a regular basis. Records detailing supervision meetings were good and carers found the meetings supportive. All carers have a copy of the foster carers' handbook, which is of good quality and comprehensive in content. Most of the carers' files inspected had signed and dated foster carer agreements, bar one kinship carer file.

Records regarding complaints are maintained and the outcomes clearly identified.

There has been a variety of training offered to foster carers over the past year and this is well set out in both the newsletter and the training handbook. Carers spoken to were aware of the training but had a variety of reasons why they were unable to attend. One carer had told the inspector that they had been waiting for some specific training in relation to managing challenging behaviour and this has been passed on to the relevant team manager. It has



been recommended that training be actively encouraged and more clearly evidenced by way of appropriate recording in the foster carer case files.

Kinship care now has a higher profile within the work of the fostering teams and a great deal of networking has taken place to raise awareness of this project. Two very enthusiastic and committed workers strive to further develop this service and continue to learn from good practice nationally and from other local authorities. They told the inspector that they are hopeful that the new assessment tool will be implemented this year. The inspectors support the development of this service.

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# 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

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

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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	4

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

### 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	FS25	22	The fostering service must further ensure that the information held on the register for foster carers meets the regulatory requirements. <b>Requirement from last inspection.</b>	01/04/06
2	FS15	27(2)(a)	Information on foster carers and any other person living in the household must be obtained as specified in Schedule 3.	01/04/06
3	FS22	28(5)(b)	All foster care agreements must be signed by the foster carer concerned. <b>Requirement from last inspection.</b>	01/04/06
4	FS15	20	All panel members must be subject to the requirements as laid out in Schedule 1.	01/04/06

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS8	It is recommended that more carers are recruited in order to match those children/young people requiring placements.
2.	FS6	It is further recommended that the health and safety checklists be reviewed to allow space for recording information.
3	FS14	It is recommended that pathway plans are reviewed and updated in discussion with the young person.
4	FS15	It is recommended that a revised application form be implemented for recruitment of panel members.
5	FS15	It is recommended that consideration be given to appointing someone to work with enquiries from potential foster carers.
6.	FS23	It is recommended that training for foster carers be actively encouraged and more clearly evidenced by way of appropriate recording in the foster carer case files.
7	FS24	It is recommended that guidance be given to staff on what appears in the profiles of children/young people that are easily available in the public domain.
8	FS25	It is recommended that when auditing foster carers' files, management should ensure that they fully review the clearance status for all responsible persons living or staying at the foster home address.
9	FS23	It is recommended that refresher training take place in managing complex behaviours.
10	FS17	It is recommended that a designated person be appointed to be the first point of contact in the recruitment of foster carers.

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