



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service

**Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service
Central House
Gladstone Street
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 6JX**

Lead Inspector
Mr Bill Drumm

Announced Inspection
6th February 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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service

Address Darlington Local Authority Fostering Service
Central House
Gladstone Street
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 6JX

Telephone number 01325 346200

Fax number 01325 346474

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Darlington Borough Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Alison Walton

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable) 0

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 14th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Darlington Borough Council Fostering Service is based in Central House in Darlington. The service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide placements to children and young people with a wide range of needs including long term and short-term foster placements. At the time of the inspection the service was supporting ninety-five foster placements across these areas of work. The service also provides a respite care fostering service. At the time of the inspection the fostering team had six members of staff, including the manager and an administrative support worker.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection took place as part of the annual inspection programme. The inspection was carried out over four days, with extra time being set aside to observe the fostering panel. Two inspectors were involved at different times during the inspection.

The service provided a lot of information to the inspectors before the inspection started. The service also provided good office space and all the things needed by the inspection team. The programme that had been arranged was well organised. This was of benefit to the inspectors, young people, the fostering team and foster carers. It also helped the inspection to be carried out with a minimum of fuss and disruption.

During the inspection, time was spent talking with young people who are fostered and their foster carers. Time was also spent talking to the 'Chair' of fostering panel, social workers, an independent reviewing officer, managers and other staff members. Young people's case files and other records were looked at as well as staff personnel files. Written policies and procedures and other documents relating to the fostering service were also looked at.

Visits were made to four foster carers. Their views and comments have been included in this report. Questionnaires were received from young people's social workers (45), foster carers (17) and young people (15).

What the service does well:

The fostering service is well managed. The manager is held in high regard and the fostering team are committed and experienced "child care" workers. The manager and staff are qualified and have the necessary skills to do their jobs. Foster carers said that they were "generally happy" with the service they receive. They also said good things about the fostering team. Comments like, "I feel valued by Social Services, they treat me with respect and more professionally than they have in the past, they do get back to you when you leave a message" and "they're very friendly" were not uncommon.

Children spoke to said that, they "felt safe" in their placements. The assessment of potential foster carers is thorough. A lot of checks are made of people who want to be foster carers to make sure that they would not harm children. Staff and foster carers are fully aware of the organisation's safeguarding children procedures.

Children spoken to said that they were "well looked after" and were "helped to stay in contact with their family and friends". They also said that they were

“helped with schoolwork and encouraged to attend school and to do their homework”. Children also said they were “often asked about what they think of things and what affects their lives” as well as “how things could be made better”.

Children have regular Looked After Reviews (LAR’s) and are fully involved in them. Children spoken to said, “it’s good that somebody asks you what you want” and “she’s really nice to talk to”.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the fostering team has become more settled in both staffing and management. Attempts have also been made to do the things which earlier inspections had suggested, for example: foster carers are made aware of the ‘whistle-blowing policy’ and a consultation exercise was undertaken with foster carers to find out what they think of the fostering service. Foster carer training records are kept up to date and training for foster carers in first aid remains recent and up to date.

A development worker has been employed and is responsible for working with looked after children.

What they could do better:

The manager of the fostering service should review the foster carer agreement form and the register of foster parents to make sure that they both fully meet the requirements of the regulations. Staff personnel files also need review, particularly with regard to including photographs of the fostering team, and proof of their identity. Membership of the fostering panel needs to be increased to include a local authority elected member and a foster parent.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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

We looked at outcomes for standard 12

The fostering service effectively monitors and promotes the health of Children. This helps to ensure the wellbeing of all children in foster placements.

EVIDENCE:

An examination of children's and carers' records confirmed that the fostering service promotes children's health and wellbeing. Social workers and fostering officers stay in regular contact with foster carers and children in placement. Regular checks are made of carers' log-books and diaries. Children's care plans were looked at and were found to contain information about their health needs. There was evidence to confirm links with relevant health care professionals. Foster carers interviewed were able to demonstrate their understanding of the health needs of the children placed with them. They also understood the need for parental consent to treatment. Young people spoken to said, "I go to the doctor's when I'm ill" and "my foster carers help me to eat healthily, the food's nice". A number of questionnaires were returned and these further confirmed that children receive help with their health. Comments from questionnaires included, "they give us the best, healthy nutritional diet", "I go on the trampoline and family walks", "I eat a lot of fruit and am generally fit" and "I go to the doctor's and dentist".

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

We looked at outcomes for 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

The manager of the fostering team has the necessary skills and competencies to undertake their role.

The fostering service provides suitable foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds.

The matching of children with suitable foster carers is appropriate. Formal risk assessments take place as part of the matching process, and help to ensure the stability of any placements.

Staff and carers have a good understanding of child protection procedures and try to make safe, caring and secure placements.

Those who work for the fostering service are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. The recruitment processes for foster carers support the welfare of children. The recruitment of staff needs to be reviewed in order to safeguard the welfare of children.

The fostering panel appropriately monitors placements and outcomes for children. Panel membership needs to be reviewed in order to ensure the participation of a local authority elected member.

EVIDENCE:

It was obvious throughout the inspection that the organisation and manager are suitable to run a fostering service. The manager has the necessary skills, experience and competencies to promote and ensure the welfare and safety of children. This is supported by the organisations policies and procedures.

Foster carers' records were examined and were found to be comprehensive. A meeting with the Chair of Fostering Panel and a discussion with staff confirmed that the recruitment and assessment of foster carers is thorough. Young people spoken to and questionnaires received from them all stated that they were happy with their foster placements. Comments included, "I have my family around me, not strangers", "I get good food and I get loved" and "it's mint". Darlington Borough Council has also participated in the "Sahara Project", a project aimed at the recruitment of minority ethnic foster carers.

Fostering officers and foster carers both confirmed that efforts are made to ensure a suitable match between children and foster carers. Foster carers interviewed said they were involved in the matching process and generally this process worked well. A number of records were examined and it was noted that formal risk assessments are undertaken as part of the matching process and before placements are made.

Young people spoken to all stated that they "felt safe" in their foster placements one young person said, "I feel safe and well cared for". Social workers and fostering officers confirmed that the young people they were responsible for were "safe and free from harm". Young people spoken to and those who filled in the questionnaires stated that they "knew how to make a complaint if they needed to". Foster parents are all offered training with regard to child protection and bullying.

An examination of individual staff files confirmed that staff members who work within the fostering team are professionally qualified. There was also evidence to confirm that staff members continue to develop their skills and competencies through further training and development. Staff members' files examined did not contain suitable evidence in respect of proof of identity or up to date photographs of each staff member. Some employment histories were also difficult to track.

The inspectors attended the fostering panel. It was observed that the panel was efficient and well run and focussed on the positive outcomes for young people. However it was also observed that the membership of the fostering panel did not include a local authority elected member. It was also noted that the review documentation for foster carers included typed notes by them that had been left unsigned and undated.

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

We looked at outcomes for standards 7 and 13

The fostering service provides placements which promote equality and values diversity.

Children placed with foster carers are provided with good support. This promotes their educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

All young people spoken to and those who answered questionnaires said they were "happy with their foster placements and foster carers". They also said that their "needs were being met". The young people spoken to said that foster carers ask their opinions about things. They also said, that their social workers asked them how they "get on with their foster carers".

All the young people spoken to and those who completed questionnaires confirmed that not only do their foster carers help them with schoolwork they also encourage them to "stick in at school". Foster carers spoken to said they try to work with the young people and to help them do as much as they can at school. Children's files did not always contain copies of Personal Education Plans (PEP's) or Individual Education Plans (IEP's).

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

We looked at outcomes for standards 10 and 11

The fostering service makes good provision for the promotion of contact between children, their families and friends.

The fostering service seeks the views of young people about their lives and the care they receive.

EVIDENCE:

Discussions with foster carers and an examination of records confirmed that expectations with regard to contact are clear and explicit. Issues relating to contact are fully documented within individual placement agreements.

Fifteen young people completed and returned questionnaires. All said “the fostering team ask us about our foster carers” and “what we think about things”. Two indicated that their social workers never saw them on their own to ask them how things are. The Borough Council has appointed a looked after children’s development officer to work closely with all children who are looked after. Part of their role is to find out what children really think about being fostered.

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

We looked at outcomes for standards 14 and 29

The fostering service and the foster carers contribute toward the preparation of young people for transition into adulthood.

Foster carers receive appropriate allowances and expenses for looking after children.

EVIDENCE:

Each foster carer receives a foster carer's handbook, which contains information about how they can help a young person prepare for adult life through the promotion of skills, developing confidence and gaining knowledge. The Borough Council has restructured and a single Children's Services Department has been established. A number of initiatives are ongoing with health and education specifically for looked after children. The Borough Council has also established a leaving care team.

The Borough Council has recently implemented new rates of payment to foster carers. None of the foster carers interviewed expressed any concern about the level of payment they receive. A small number did voice concern about not receiving mileage allowances for taking young people to activities that were out of the immediate area.

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

We looked at outcomes for standards 1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28

There is a Statement of Purpose, which sets out clearly the aims and objectives of the service.

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

The fostering team manager has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service.

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Members of staff working in the fostering team are well supported and managed.

The fostering service employs a sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff.

Darlington Borough Council is a fair and competent employer.

Staff within the fostering department receive regular training in order to maintain and enhance their skills.

Staff receive regular supervision and performance appraisal to enable them to continue to provide a good service.

The fostering service has clear strategies for supporting carers.

Supervision and support of foster carers is good. The foster carers' agreement requires review and up dating.

Foster carers are able to access a range of different training to help ensure they have up to date skills and knowledge.

Case files of children contain up to date and comprehensive case records.

The administrative records are well maintained. The register of foster carers' needs should be reviewed in order to ensure that it contains all the essential information required.

The premises used by the fostering team meet the needs of the service.

The service is financially viable and the budget is adequate.

The financial processes of the fostering team are robust and allow for good financial management.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers who were spoken to confirmed that they had received a copy of the organisations Statement of Purpose and that it accurately reflects the service's practice. The policies and procedures looked at during the inspection reflected the Statement of Purpose. Young people who were spoken to confirmed they had been given a copy of the 'young person's guide' to being looked after.

It was clear from examining records and from discussion that the manager has the necessary experience and skills to manage the team efficiently and effectively.

The manager has the systems in place which are necessary in order to ensure that the operations of the fostering team are monitored effectively and efficiently. Staff supervision systems work well and staff commented that they found supervision to be a 'supportive experience' rather than a 'policing' one. Systems are also in place to notify the Commission for Social Care Inspection of any significant events, which may occur.

Social workers said that communication with the fostering team is 'excellent'. Staff members have clearly defined job descriptions and when interviewed were clear about their individual roles and responsibilities. All staff spoken to were positive about the management of the service.

All staff within the fostering team receive regular supervision from the team manager. The team are appropriately qualified and experienced. Training is available for staff to continue to develop their skills and competencies. The staff team were friendly and welcoming and the team room had a positive atmosphere. Foster carers interviewed were also positive about the help and support they receive from the team.

It was evident from interviews and from examining records that the organisation provides an effective fostering team. The staff team are well qualified and have the necessary skills, experience and competencies to undertake their role.

Darlington Borough Council has well established and well developed recruitment and selection procedures. This ensures fairness and equal opportunities.

The fostering service provides a comprehensive induction training programme for staff. Training needs are highlighted during individual supervision sessions and a clear record is maintained of all training, which has been undertaken.

Regular formal supervision exists for all staff in addition to regular team meetings. In addition staff have clear job descriptions and understand their individual roles and responsibilities. Staff members interviewed felt they were well managed and supported by the manager.

A number of the carers interviewed said that they would like more organised activities such as coffee mornings and social events. This would give them more opportunity to develop links with other foster carers. When asked, all foster carers said they felt appreciated and valued, they also said they felt part of the team. The role of the child's social worker and that of the fostering officer were clearly defined, each being clear as to what is expected of them.

Foster carers receive regular supervision from the fostering officer. Annual reviews of foster carers are also undertaken. Foster carers interviewed stated that they felt valued by the authority, and also said that they made a difference to young people's lives. A recent formal consultation event has been held where foster carers were invited to give their views about the fostering service and how it could be improved. The foster carer agreement needs to be reviewed. It needs to make clear the terms of the foster carer's approval; what respite care foster carers may expect; the process for the termination of approval; and that foster carers can contact the CSCI should they need to do so.

Foster carers confirmed that they all undertake comprehensive induction training as part of their recruitment and assessment process. There was evidence available to confirm that training is an on-going process and continues following registration as a foster carer.

Children's files examined were well structured and the information easily accessible. Case files examined contained LAC documentation. Some children's case files contained Personal Education Plans or Individual Education Plans although their inclusion was not consistent. There was also evidence on individual children's case files to suggest that a formal risk assessment had been undertaken prior to placements being made. Foster carers spoken to confirmed that they are generally well informed of the identified needs of the young people in their care. Foster carers spoke highly of the review process. They felt included in the process and that their involvement was appreciated.

Administrative records were generally well maintained. Records of foster carers assessments, reviews and approval decisions were of a high standard. However, the foster carers' register did not include the dates of foster carers reviews.

The premises used by the fostering service are easily accessible. There are suitable security measures in place to ensure that confidential information is not accessed by any unauthorised personnel.

A detailed annual budget was available for inspection, which indicated that the service operates on a secure financial footing.

The budget of the fostering team is appropriately in line with existing departmental protocols.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	4
15	2
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	3
31	X

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

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS 22	28(5)(b)	The fostering service provider must enter into a written agreement covering all those matters specified in Schedule 5 of the fostering Services Regulations 2002.	30/04/06
2	FS 25	31	The fostering services provider must enter in a register the date of each annual review of carer's approval.	30/04/06
3	FS 30	24 (c)(d)	The fostering service provider must establish a fostering panel that includes at least one elected member.	30/04/06
4	FS 15	20 (Schedule 1)	The fostering service provider must ensure the positive proof of identity of all its staff, including a recent photograph.	30/04/06

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	FS 13	It is recommended that each young person's case file include an up to date Personal Education Plan.
2	FS 21	It is recommended that the fostering service develops a plan to ensure that all foster carer reviews take place regularly.
3	FS 23	It is recommended that the fostering service considers different ways in which foster carers can meet informally in order to improve networking opportunities.
4	FS 30	It is recommended that foster carers sign and date the foster carer review documentation that is presented at panel in order to confirm their involvement and agreement.

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