

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Vision Fostering Agency Ltd**

**Bridge House  
High Street  
Dartford  
Kent DA1 1DJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Sophie  
Wood

*Announced*  
23 May 2005 9:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

## Reader Information

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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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DA1 1DJ

**Telephone number** 01322 629260

**Fax number** 01322 629280

**Email address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Vision Fostering Agency Ltd

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Mrs Ranjit Kang

**Type of registration** IFA Fostering Agency

**No. of places registered (if applicable)**

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**          18 May 2004

### **Brief Description of the Service:**

Vision Fostering Agency Ltd is based in Dartford, Kent and provides a wide range of placements for Children and Young People, including; emergency, bridging, assessment, short - term, long - term and parent and child. Carers from wide - ranging backgrounds, cultures and religious denominations are recruited, in order that Children and Young People are placed sympathetically and appropriately, in terms of their own race, religion and culture. The Agency continues to grow and as such, more Agency personnel have been recruited. Currently, effort is being placed upon developing its services for Children with disabilities. The Agency currently employs 13 full - time staff and supports 150 Carers and 133 Children / Young People. Carers live in and around the Kent area and London Boroughs, providing a wide range of accommodation and services, to meet the specific needs of those placed with them.

# **SUMMARY**

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

The inspection commenced on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2005 and was conducted over a five - day period. Time was spent interviewing Agency staff, reading policies and procedures and scrutinising other relevant documentation and records. Carers were randomly selected, in order that their files and those of the Children / Young People placed with them could be inspected. The inspector also conducted home visits. Other sources of evidence included the observation of a Panel meeting, a training session and perusal of documentation received by the Commission, including the Manager's Self - Assessment, Pre - Inspection Questionnaire and questionnaires from Children / Young People, Carers and Placing Authorities. All of the evidence supported that the Agency is well - run, by an experienced senior management team. Some improvements are needed in terms of records and monitoring. Carers are carefully recruited and well - supported, through regular visits and ongoing relevant training.

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

The Agency retains and recruits Carers from a wide and diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Hence, Children and Young People are placed appropriately and sympathetically, according to their presenting needs. Consultation processes ensure that Children, Young People, Carers and Placing Authorities have the opportunity to express views and opinions about the running and continuing development of the Agency. Carers are visited regularly and receive ongoing training and guidance. Policies and procedures are regularly updated and the Panel applies stringent criteria in approving and reviewing Carers. The Agency works openly and transparently with the Commission, making appropriate notifications and seeking good practice advice at regular intervals. Following the two previous annual inspections, all requirements and recommendations made by inspectors have been speedily implemented.

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

Matching evidence is now written and recorded in all children's files and Foster Carer Agreements now fully comply with regulations. The Children's Guide is now translated into more languages and interview notes are now held on staff files. A policy on case recording has been written and implemented and training days are offered on various days / times, to accommodate the needs of Carers. A major development has been to secure the services of an independent 'Quality Assurance' team, which has so far conducted five visits and has an annual schedule of future visits planned. These will be conducted monthly, with each visit focusing on different areas of the services provided.

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

The recording and monitoring of allegations and significant incidents needs to improve and Carers should receive at least one unannounced visit each year. Attention should be paid to ensure that personnel files of sessional and administrative staff are of the same quality as those of the full – time, permanent social work employees. Case records for children require expansion and the ongoing identified training needs for qualified social work staff should be addressed.

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**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection



# Being Healthy

## **The intended outcomes these Standards are:**

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12**

Foster Carers positively promote the health and development of children.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Individual children's files were inspected and Carers were interviewed. Children were registered with health care services and appointments were being supported. In some cases, Carers held more information than was on file at the Agency. Placing Authorities did not always provide sufficient background information, although the Agency could demonstrate that it had 'chased' this. Carers receive training and guidance in respect of maintaining optimum health and Foster Carer Agreements make this requirement clear. Appropriate referrals are made to external agencies where specific health concerns are raised and the Agency is currently reviewing its documentation in respect of maintaining detailed and accurate health care notes in respect of the children placed with its Carers.

# 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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 15,30.**

Those persons running and managing the Agency are suitably qualified and experienced. Robust recruitment processes for Agency staff and Carers are, in the main, followed and the needs of children are matched to the experience and skills of Foster Carers. The monitoring systems in respect of protecting against abuse and neglect could improve. The Panel works to clear and effective protocols.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Personnel records of Agency staff were randomly selected and scrutinised. Records of those individuals recruited from overseas were of a very good standard. In all instances of personnel records, evidence of relevant professional qualifications was seen and CRB certificates were in place. Personnel files in respect of 'Sessional' Social Workers – those used to conduct Form F Assessments – could improve and it was noted that not all of these had CRB's conducted through the Agency itself. However, such individuals did have current CRB clearance through other sources. A personnel file for an Administrative staff member was also found to contain some omissions. Form F's had been completed to a good standard and the Agency continues to monitor the quality of these assessments against its own criteria. Written evidence was seen in all of the children's files to demonstrate that matching considerations had been made prior to a placement being secured. In some

areas, the written evidence regarding 'matching' could be expanded upon. Carers were visited in their own homes and all were clean, well – maintained and free from obvious hazards. Detailed health and safety checks are conducted during the initial assessment and annually thereafter. A clear health and safety policy is in place and Carers are provided with ongoing training. Whilst evidence was found to demonstrate that allegations of neglect and / or abuse are investigated by the Agency, systems whereby this information is collated and regularly scrutinised need to be further developed. This statement refers to how this information is held; it is not suggestive that such incidents are not effectively monitored, as indeed, they are. The Agency has a clear recruitment policy and employs staff who have relevant qualifications and experience. Written references are followed up by telephone enquiries and Enhanced CRB's are obtained and renewed. Only those personnel who are qualified and experienced to undertake Form F Assessments do so and the Panel, which was observed, scrutinise and question the information presented to them, for both Initial Approvals and Annual Reviews. Records of previous Panel meetings indicated that the group has been quorate and the members within this group come from a wide range of relevant backgrounds. The Independent Chair was interviewed and was observed to follow the Panel's own written protocols throughout the meeting seen. All Panel members have been subject to CRB clearance; there is a clear procedure in place to cover decision – making, when all members are not in agreement and the Panel has access to medical expertise when required.

# 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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7, 13.**

The Agency clearly values diversity among its Carers and Children and actively promotes educational achievement.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Agency continues to retain and recruit Carers from a very wide range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This results in Children and Young People being placed in culturally sensitive and appropriate placements. Carers were visited and it was evident that their own such backgrounds had been fundamental during the matching process of those children placed with them. Young people spoken with confirmed the importance of this aspect, particularly unaccompanied, asylum – seeking minors. The Agency provides training for Carers, which covers diversity, equal opportunity and dealing with discrimination. The Agency is currently developing its service to be better able to accommodate Children with disabilities through the proposed recruitment of a 'specialist' worker and other additional resources, including specific training for Carers. There is clear guidance within Foster Carer Agreements, detailing the responsibility of Carers to promote and support educational achievement and those Carers seen were able to demonstrate the lengths they had gone to in finding appropriate school / college placements for those in their care. School uniform grants are provided by the Agency, in order that those attending mainstream placements can immediately purchase the required clothing. Young People commented very positively about this aspect, through direct interviews and written questionnaires.

# 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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10, 11.**

The Agency provides excellent support and facilities for contact arrangements. Consultation with Children, Young People and other parties is actively promoted.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Throughout the three days spent at the Agency's main office, the 'Contact Rooms' were continually in use. The Agency has clear and specific written agreements with placing authorities, for the instances when it is requested to support individual contact arrangements. The three rooms used were beautifully furnished and equipped and Agency staff were observed to be welcoming to visiting birth family members. Individual Carers frequently support contact arrangements, either at the office, in their own homes or at other venues, as agreed with the placing authority. Details of Carer's responsibilities are clearly recorded. Outcomes and observations made during contact visits are written up and passed to the Child / Young Person's responsible social worker. The Carers interviewed stated that Agency staff provide them with very positive support with contact arrangements, which can be a difficult / sensitive role. Written records evidenced that the Agency implements clear consultation processes. Placing Agencies are always asked for feedback, following the ending of a placement and evidence was seen to support that Directors of all Social Services Teams using the Agency had been written to, asking for feedback. Carers and Young People are asked for written views, prior to Review meetings and the Agency also sends out periodic questionnaires to Carers and Children, in an attempt to obtain their views about the service. Children and Young People spoken to confirmed that Agency staff routinely speak with them privately, during Carer support visits.



# 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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 14, 29.**

Young People are effectively supported by their Carers to prepare for adult living. Carers regularly receive their agreed payments and expenses on time.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Clear written requirements are in place for Carers assisting Young People preparing for adult living. Those Young People spoken with, described the level and type of support they were receiving from Carers and this included budgeting, self help domestic skills and securing work / college placements. Evidence of Local Authority 'Pathway Plans' was seen on files and Carers spoke positively in almost every case about the Young Person's own Placing Authority, in terms of consulting the Young Person and the Carer in developing and implementing these. Written policies and requirements were clear and the Agency provides specific training for Carers who are accommodating young people approaching adulthood. Information about allowances and expenses was clear and explicit. Such fees are reviewed annually. No adverse comments were received from Carers about payments. They are made on time and are accurate.

# 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 cares 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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 1, 2, 4, 5, 16 17, 18, 19, 23, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.**

The Statement of Purpose is clear and concise and has been subject to regular and ongoing review. Managers of the service are suitably qualified and experienced. They manage effectively, although some monitoring systems could improve. There is a sufficient number of qualified staff, who now need to access additional development training. Carers receive frequent support visits and clear written guidance. Case records for Children need to develop further,



to include all of the elements required. Financial systems and practices are sound and regularly audited.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Statement of Purpose contains all of the information required and it had been reviewed and updated since the last inspection. Senior managers within the Organisation were interviewed. Each possessed the qualifications and experience needed to effectively run the Agency. Lines of communication, accountability and responsibility were clear and monitoring and quality assurance systems were developing. The use of an external 'Quality Assurance' team has recently commenced, with five visits being conducted so far. All Agency staff are appropriately qualified and receive regular supervision from a manager. Annual appraisals have also commenced. Such records were inspected and demonstrate the need to further explore and provide post - qualifying training for individuals. Caseloads are manageable and staff are not required to undertake specific pieces of work until they are deemed as competent to do so. Contracts and job descriptions are detailed and specific, with generous terms and conditions included. The Agency wishes to expand its service, in terms of providing 'specialist' placements for Children with disabilities and evidence was seen to demonstrate that a key post and additional resources are being developed to enable this to happen. There is a clear written strategy in place for working with Carers. Placing Officers, through their returned questionnaires reported good communication with the Agency and Carers and written evidence supported that all Carers receive regular, recorded supervision from their Agency Social Worker. 'Out of Hours' support was described as "excellent". All Carers had up to date written Foster Carer Agreements in place and were conversant with the Agency's complaint's procedure. Not all carers confirmed that they had received an unannounced visit from the Agency in the last year; however, the Agency confirmed to the inspector that such visits are planned and explained that these may be perceived by Carers as a 'pop in' and therefore not register them as such. Detailed recording by Agency staff would provide clearer evidence to support that such visits are happening. It Case records for Children were inspected. Some contained more information than others and in all instances, insufficient 'health' information was found. This element is already being addressed by the Agency by way of introducing a separate booklet, which will record all 'health related' information, in respect of the individual Child. This document can then be 'passed on' should the Child move on from the care of the Agency. It was also noted that the written records of the support visits to Carers were being 'copied' into the child's file, as a record that the needs / progress of the child in placement had been discussed. This practice should cease immediately, as when more than one Child is in placement, this resulted in information on other Children being held in other Children's files. Administrative records were inspected and found to be in good order, generally. A separate file contains information about complaints made to the Agency and how these have been

investigated and concluded. There were some entries in Carers' files, which were not held in this way and these need to be added. Training records for Carers indicated that relevant courses are provided at regular intervals and every course is evaluated by attendees. Carers and Agency staff frequently attend courses together. Care is taken by the Agency to provide times and dates that 'fit in' with the needs of Carers, for example, those with working partners and others needing to make child care arrangements. A training session was observed. This was delivered in a style that suited those present and was led by an Independent Social Worker who possessed the expertise and experience required to deliver the course. The Agency premises were toured. Good security was noted, with access to confidential information restricted. Agency workers enjoy spacious accommodation; there are numerous meeting rooms, plenty of 'desk space', with computers, telephones and other necessary resources. Financial policies, procedures and supporting records were scrutinised. The Agency has a detailed and specific 'Development and Business' Plan, excellent expenditure records and recording systems and is subject to regular auditing by a Chartered Accountant.

# 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>
<b>12</b>	2

STAYING SAFE	
<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>	3
<b>30</b>	4

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	4
<b>13</b>	3
<b>31</b>	N/A

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

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

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

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.	4	42(1), (2)	"The registered person shall establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 and supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review conducted by him". Whilst the Agency demonstrates a number of excellent monitoring systems, the Commission has not yet received any such reports.	Action Plan to be received by CSCI by 14/7/05
2.	12	15	The fostering service provider shall promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. This requirement is made within the context of the current lack of records held on children's files, pertaining to individual health care needs and appointments.	Action Plan to be received by CSCI by 14/7/05
3.	22	32(5)	The current practice of copying written records of visits to Carers into Children's files is to cease as confidentiality is compromised.	Immediate
4.				
5.				

## 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.	22	It is strongly recommended that all unannounced visits to Carers by representatives of the Agency are clearly recorded.
2.	24	It is recommended that the contents of children's files be reviewed in order to ensure that all key areas are being recorded and filled in.
3.	17	It is recommended that training plans for qualified staff be further developed in that post - qualifying training be provided.
4.	25	It is recommended that the format for the complaint's monitoring log be adopted with regards the recording and ongoing monitoring of allegations.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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