



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Bolton Children's Services - Fostering

**Endeavour House
98 Water Meetings Road
The Valley
Bolton
Lancashire
BL1 8SW**

Lead Inspector
Lynn O Driscoll

Announced Inspection
13th March 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

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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	Bolton Children's Services - Fostering
Address	Endeavour House 98 Water Meetings Road The Valley Bolton Lancashire BL1 8SW
Telephone number	01204 337480
Fax number	01204 337489
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	To be appointed
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 28th February 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The stated overall aim of Bolton's fostering service is –

"To safeguard, support and promote the best interests of children, young people and their families through the provision of fostering services, which ensure stable, secure, safe and effective care for all children".

One specific objective is to recruit locally, sufficient foster carers to provide the range of placements, including specialist placements such as for older children or those with special needs or from minority ethnic groups.

Core fostering services are provided by the Family Placement Team and short break care for disabled children by Bolton Shared Care. Both services have Asian foster carers utilised by neighbouring authorities.

Each team recruits, assesses, supports, supervises and reviews foster carers. Since the last inspection two workers have been specifically employed to improve the support to kinship carers.

A support group for children of carers is provided by the family placement team, and an experienced carer.

Representation services for fostered children are available through BYPASS, an advocacy service.

A wide range of relevant training courses are provided to staff and carers through the Department's Training Section.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection took place over six days and included interviews with staff, reading children, carers and staff files, visits to carers' homes and listening to views at the carers' support group. Questionnaires were also sent out before the inspection to a selection of different carers and young people nine years and over.

A joint inspection with the adoption team is taking place in September 2006 so it was agreed that this would be a "lighter touch" inspection. In particular the requirements and recommendations made following the last inspection in March and April 2005 were explored. It was also acknowledged that the service was going through a period of change and needs time to settle again.

What the service does well:

This service is very well managed and staff members appreciate the support they receive.

Some carers have recognised that the service is consulting with them more about changes, which makes them feel valued.

One carer wrote, *"We have a positive working relationship with Bolton Fostering and would not have been able to continue caring without the care, help and support given by the Bolton Shared Care Team"*.

This service involves carers in many aspects of it's work including, recruiting, training, support, developing policies and they are now prepresented on forums with councillors.

Most of the carers who returned a questionnaire ticked that they were "very satisfied" with the support from the fostering service. One carer wrote *"I'm able to talk to my social worker anytime about anything"*. Another wrote *"there is help there when you need it"*.

Another carer really appreciated the fact that she was listened to when she was feeling unwell and distressed due to personal problems and was not pressured to place young people but was *"left alone and supported when needed in my own home"*.

Bolton Fostering have a good number of very committed and experienced carers.

One kinship carer wrote *"I think that social services do a very good job and make good from bad situations, showing support and care to foster children and carers..... it has been a delight to watch him go from a very distressed*

little boy to a very special teenager with my help and social services help and I would just like to say thank you”.

The support group for foster carers’ children continues to meet regularly and is well attended.

The service continues to actively promote the educational development of looked after children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The inspectors were impressed with the amount of work that has taken place over the last year to make sure the Regulations and standards are met and there are good outcomes for children and young people who are fostered.

The “Statement of Purpose” has been updated since the last inspection and is available on request.

A new children’s guide has been produced which involved young people. There are two versions to suit different age groups and the pack includes a DVD about young people’s rights.

A new system to make sure carer’s reviews take place within twelve months has been introduced.

Carer’s are expected to attend training and this is now discussed at their annual review and included on the new foster care agreement.

Training is now provided in Urdu. Crèche facilities are also available. The venues were described as “OK” “good” “great” and “comfortable”.

The Managers have been to observe the training on offer to carers, which has been revamped since the last inspection.

The carers spoken to felt comfortable to contribute and felt the level of the content was right. The handouts were considered to be useful and easy to understand and providing good reference points. One wrote, “*They make you think hard about the issues discussed*”.

The payments to carers have increased.

Carers are now being invited to the fostering panel.

One of the managers of the fostering service has got a NVQ Level 4 in Management since the last inspection and the other manager has started this qualification.

Since the last inspection three learning mentors have been employed to avoid school exclusions of looked after children. An educational psychologist is available to foster carers for individual consultations.

What they could do better:

Recent changes have meant there are not enough staff in the fostering team.

The staff files held at human resources were not in good order.

Because the review panel is informal, carers feel comfortable and want to discuss in detail what has been happening in the last twelve months so more time is needed than the fifteen minutes allocated.

Not all diaries are being completed properly.

Some carers have not benefited from the new payment structure as much as others, and it does seem to affect experienced carers with particularly difficult placements. The inspectors do feel that if there is only one placement, which is necessary given the individual's assessed needs and risks this is very different than a carer who has a vacancy.

One kinship carer wrote "*I think even relations of the children should be paid a weekly rate with the work that is involved as it is now a thankless job but we have the peace of mind knowing that the children are happy*".

One enhanced carer wrote that there now needs to be discussions about their new role and what they expect of the service and vice versa.

The service needs to make sure all looked after children get dental treatment as soon as they need it.

The service is currently reviewing it's out of hours support as it is not well used.

One carer argued the need for better packages of care to enable very difficult placements to succeed including for example, respite.

Some carers are not being visited by their link worker at least every two months.

Carers were concerned that at the moment there is only one support group and the person running it is moving into the adoption team.

Carers' suggestions for improvements to the training on offer included "more time for open discussion" and more input from carers and children fostered.

The fostering team have moved to new premises. Although some members of the staff team see the modern office as an improvement, everyone said that it was overly warm and airless which made it difficult to work in. Sound-proofing to interview rooms particularly was very poor and confidentiality was not necessarily assured.

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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Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Overall the arrangements in place for ensuring the good health of looked after children is satisfactory with the exception of dental services. Improvements must be made to ensure all diaries are adequately maintained.

EVIDENCE:

A policy on promoting the Health of Looked After Children is available on request and the carers' handbook has a specific section on health issues.

The children and young people the inspectors met during this inspection were all fit and healthy but finding NHS dentists is proving to be very difficult. Foster carers raised this issue during inspectors' visits to their homes and at the support group meeting. One carer commented, "*This is a real problem in Bolton.*" Emergency treatment is available at Lever Chambers but one young person visited has been waiting to see a Dentist since July 2005 and another young person since November 2005. At the support group it was suggested that children's services could specifically employ a Dentist for looked after children, as part of the looked after health team.

There is a CAMHS team in place, which includes a clinical psychologist, LAC nurse and mental health support worker.

It was found that diaries were not being well maintained by some foster carers. At the next inspection in September there will need to be good evidence provided that health records are accurately and appropriately maintained and can be transferred with the young person when a placement ends.

A questionnaire from a young person commented that her health would be improved if the foster carer used less oil in the food provided.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30.

This service is well managed and also benefits from a significant number of committed and very experienced carers.

The files held at the human resources section do not meet legal requirements which is a basic safeguard.

Tighter systems must be in place in respect to safe caring guidelines and countering bullying.

The fostering panel is well organised, ensuring relevant questions are asked and good discussions take place.

EVIDENCE:

Bolton Fostering Service has a particularly good management team who are very committed to positive change. They are suitably qualified and very experienced. Staff and carers spoke of their accessibility and continued support and guidance.

The inspectors found some very good matches resulting in good outcomes for children but there were equally some issues, which need addressing. It became evident at the support meeting that some carers had not had placements for a significant period of time yet others had gone over numbers

in the same period and with the same age range. One carer stated "*the service needs to be honest and upfront if they don't want people working for them so they can get on with their lives*".

Staff files were examined at the human resources section to find they were still not in good order. They are not indexed and some of the particulars required by law were not in place. This is an outstanding legal requirement and must be given priority attention.

All carers receive training in child protection but not all those visited were clear about specific safe caring in their own homes. Health and safety questionnaires should be completed by supervising social workers in preparation for annual reviews but this had not occurred in all instances.

It was found that one identified young person is being bullied at School which must be addressed. It is not a one off incident as initially thought.

The inspectors observed the fostering review panel and it was pleasing to find that the majority of carers attended in person. It is chaired by the head of the service, a team leader and two independent members. It was very relaxed and consequently carers felt able to share in detail the highs and lows of the last twelve months.

The minutes of the last fostering panel were read evidencing continued good practice. Relevant questions are asked, any exemptions are discussed and for first reviews the children's social worker presents a written report, which includes children's reviews.

Since the last inspection a significant development is that carers are now invited to attend panel and are given time to consider three questions to enable them to feel more comfortable and to give informed answers.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7, 13 and 31

The service must ensure any gaps in matching are appropriately addressed.

The service continues to promote the educational development of looked after children.

The shared care team continues to provide a very good service enabling many children to live at home.

EVIDENCE:

The inspectors did raise some specific issues in respect of ensuring good cultural, linguistic and religious matches and where there are gaps ensuring these are efficiently met. One young person has ceased having a mentor, which did ensure links were maintained with her ethnic community. It also became apparent that no one was pronouncing her name correctly, which is fundamental to identity. Her independence would also appear to be restricted by the conflicting cultural and gender expectations. Another young person was equally unclear as to why she stopped seeing a mentor, which she had found very beneficial.

The fostering service continues to give high priority to meeting the educational needs of looked after children and developments since the last inspection include the production of child friendly and age appropriate learning and development plans and training on Personal Education Plans offered to carers and staff.

Three learning mentors attended the support groups. Their specific role is to liaise with carers, social workers and schools to avoid exclusion. The process is to set up Personal Education Plan meetings as needed where specific targeted work in the foster carers home will be agreed to integrate the young person back into school. This is a very new project and they will genuinely welcome any ideas from carers for improvements to it.

An educational psychologist is also now available at the support group offering individual consultations to carers.

Bolton Shared Care continues to provide a flexible, needs led, short-term break service to disabled children and their families. This is separately resourced and is well managed by a very committed, experienced, child centred and competent individual.

Feedback during this inspection evidences that this service remains highly valued by parents and helps them to continue to care for their own child in the long term. The regular and consistent support provided by two carers visited was described as "*invaluable*".

The carers also remain particularly pleased with the support they receive from their link worker. One wrote "*everyone working in shared care do an excellent job*".

Children's wishes are ascertained in respect of any proposed placement, with gradual introductions, ensuring a good match for the child and his/her carer. Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 and 11.

The arrangements in place to promote contact are very good.

There are systems in place to actively encourage consultation but this is a recognised area for continued development.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 10 was found to be met in full at the last inspection, so was not explored in any depth during this “lighter touch” inspection. The contact arrangements discussed provided good evidence that carers continue to go to great lengths to ensure appropriate contact is maintained, including, for example, monthly train trips to Yorkshire. Many offer contact in their own homes.

The shared care team as part of the overall Bridges Services have focused on innovative ways of improving consultation in the last twelve months, but this was not explored in depth on this occasion.

The inspectors were particularly disappointed to find that the looked after children group at Bypass has still not been reinstated.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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 the following standard(s):

29

The arrangements to ensure appropriate and prompt payment to carers are satisfactory.

The recent changes have caused some anxiety and will require an ongoing process of consultation.

EVIDENCE:

Since the last inspection payments have increased to carers, but at differential levels. The main complaint from carers is in respect to retainers. Having carefully considered all views the inspectors do feel that a small number of carers who only have one placement in line with the individual's assessed needs and risks should not be financially penalised. Carers specifically requested that letters are sent out explaining how the changes to payments have been made.

The inspectors acknowledge that the management team are having regular discussions with those affected.

This matter will be looked at in more detail at the next inspection.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 26 and 32.

The management team are all suitably qualified, experienced and child focussed.

There are an insufficient number of staff in the fostering team to meet the demands of the service.

This service gives a high priority to staff and carer development and continues to offer a good range of training opportunities.

EVIDENCE:

The Statement of Purpose has been updated since the last inspection and the Children's Guide has been produced in two user friendly formats to meet the needs of different age groups. The pack also includes a DVD on young people's rights.

Also, as recommended at the last inspection, the preparation course has been revamped and managers have observed for themselves the quality of the training.

Carers continue to have access to a wide range of training courses and the revised foster care agreement, as recommended, now emphasises the expectation that they continue to attend courses. This is now specifically discussed at their annual review.

Areas for improvement at the last inspection included providing courses in Urdu and crèche facilities which have both been acted upon.

The management team have made some significant changes in recent months and this inspection took place during the inevitably difficult transition period. Fortunately an inspection team will be inspecting both the fostering and the adoption service in September 2006 when it will be expected that the support systems will have been fully re-established.

Staff were given their choice of working in the fostering or the adoption team which is good practice, but has resulted in insufficient staff to undertake the demands of the fostering service which is concerning to both the supervising social workers and carers.

Some carers were not being visited by their supervising social worker at least two monthly while others had not been reallocated a new worker after agency staff left so they are now unclear who to contact. One carer commented "*I have been approved for nine years and am on my ninth link worker who is also temporary.*"

Recruitment to the vacant posts has commenced. Once reallocations have been made carers would like home introductions with their previous link worker. Some carers complained that they only got a phone call to say the

link worker was leaving that day and others argued that they did not even get a phone call.

At the present time there is only one support group running and members were concerned as to who would be coordinating this in the future as the staff member has moved into the adoption team. One carer commented, "I enjoy these meetings but there is not enough of them".

Since the last inspection two posts have been filled specifically to develop the recruitment, support and training of kinship carers. This is very much in its infancy and will be explored during future inspections. These workers are pursuing the possibility of a support group.

The children of foster carers support group continues to run on a regular basis.

The out of hours support is not being widely used and is consequently under review.

The fostering team have moved to new premises. Although some members of the staff team see the modern office as an improvement, everyone said that it was overly warm and airless which made it difficult to work in. Sound-proofing to interview rooms particularly was very poor and confidentiality was not assured.

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	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	2
9	2
15	1
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	3
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	2

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	2

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

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.	FS12	15(2)(b)	All children placed with carers must have regular dental treatment.	31/08/06
2.	FS12	15	Diaries must be accurate and up to date at all times. A record of all healthcare appointments and treatments must be maintained in a format that is transferable when the placement ends.	31/08/06
3.	FS8	29(7)	If the service no longer considers a carer to be suitable they must ensure an efficient process of termination in line with the Regulations or revise the terms of approval.	31/08/06
4.	FS15	20 Schedule 1	Staff files must include all the required information as specified in Schedule 1. This is an outstanding legal requirement. The initial timescale of 05/06/05 has not been met.	30/06/06
5.	FS9	11	All carers must have specific safe caring guidelines in place which are fully understood by all members of the household and which have been discussed and agreed by the child's social worker.	31/08/06
6.	FS9	11	Health and safety assessments	31/08/06

			of carers homes must take place annually.	
7.	FS9	12	The service must be proactive in countering bullying and in particular respond appropriately to the one identified young person.	30/06/06
8.	FS7	11	Before a placement is made due consideration must be given to the young person's wishes and feelings and in regard to his/her religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background. Any gaps in matching must be recorded and addressed.	30/06/06
9.	FS11	42	That systems that encourage consultation with young people, continue to be developed.	31/08/06
10.	FS29	44	That the review of payment to carers penalised by the recent changes to structure continues.	30/06/06
11.	FS17	19	That the service employs an adequate number of suitably experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the service.	30/06/06
12.	FS21	17	That the allocated supervising social worker visits the foster carer at a minimum of every two months and this is recorded.	30/06/06
13.	FS21	17	That the support groups are re-established.	31/08/06
14.	FS21	17	That the review of the out of hours arrangements is completed.	30/06/06
15.	FS22	21	That all foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker.	30/06/06
16.	FS26	23	That the issues relating to the premises as identified in this report are addressed.	30/06/06

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.	FS30	It is recommended that the time slot for review is extended.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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