



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Slough Borough Council Fostering Services

Slough Borough Council
Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
Berkshire
SL1 3UQ

15th March 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Slough Borough Council Fostering Services

Address

Slough Borough Council, Town Hall, Bath Road, Slough,
Berkshire, SL1 3UQ

Local Authority Manager

Lesley Fitzgerald

Tel No:

01753 690961

Address

Slough Borough Council, Town Hall, Bath Road, Slough,
Berkshire, SL1 3UQ

Fax No:

01753 690961

Email Address

Lesley.Fitzgerald@slough.gov.
uk

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

Date of Inspection Visit		15 - 18 March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Shelley McDonald	
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Slough Borough Council Fostering Service provides substitute family care to meet the needs of Slough children and young people who are looked after by the authority on a short term/temporary or longer term/permanent basis. The service also supports children who continue to live within their family of origin by providing regular periods of family based care.

In order to provide this variety of care, the service recruits, trains and supervises a range of foster carers.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

The overall findings of the inspection were that the fostering service was largely regulation and standard compliant.

The fostering service staff group continues to give excellent support to the foster carers. It was evident that the service is child focused and staff were aware of both the strengths and limitations of the service currently available to children and young people who are fostered. The work of the Looked After Children Education Service was impressive in meeting the needs of children in foster placements. Similarly health care of such children is given a high profile.

The management of the service is good and the inspector was pleased to learn that there is new post of Practice Manager which will support the Team Manager in her supervisory role. The inspector was also pleased to note that administrative support has been increased to the team.

Recruitment of foster carers has not been as successful as had been hoped, particularly from minority ethnic groups. The service still has some difficulty in matching children to appropriate carers.

The inspector was disappointed to learn that there has been slow movement on the appointment of a Children's Advocacy Officer and on services to help carers prepare young people for independent living.

The authority has been successful in appointing a Contact Co-ordinator to ensure that contact arrangements for looked after children are managed effectively.

Also the service has moved forward in setting up a regulation compliant foster panel.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

YES

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Those statutory requirements that appear on page 11 of this report.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	3(3) & 3(4)	FS1	Children's Guide to be revised and distributed	4/09/03
2	28(5) (b) Schedule 5	FS22	Foster Care Agreement to be brought in line with regulation	4/06/03

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector **Shelley McDonald** **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3(4)	FS1	Children's Guide to be distributed	1/06/04
2	28(5)(b) Schedule 5	FS22	Foster Care Agreement to be brought in line with regulation	1/06/04
3	34(3) Schedule 6	FS8 FS10 FS13	Foster Placement Agreement to be brought in line with regulation	1/09/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	Statement of Purpose to be amended in accordance with the standard
2	FS9	Instances of children in foster care who are bullied to be recorded
3	FS14	Carers to be trained and supported to meet this standard
4	FS15	Telephone enquiries made of referees to be recorded on personnel file
5	FS22	Unannounced visits should be clearly identifiable in the carer record
6	FS23	Both adults in two carer households to complete core training

7	FS24	Children's records to meet requirements of FS24.1
8	FS25	Prospective foster carer files to be stored securely. Records of complaints and allegations to be clearly recorded on carer file
9	FS30	Fostering Panel to receive management information about the outcome of foster carer annual reviews Fostering Panel to monitor range of carers against the needs of children to be placed

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

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

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

Number of Inspector days spent	4
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• Local Foster Care Association	NA
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NO
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	15/03/04
Time of Inspection	09.15
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	22

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The service provided a clear statement of purpose which largely met this standard. However the document has some shortfalls including errors in dates and personnel which were identified by the inspector.

Standards to be addressed:

1.4 Relevant qualifications of staff and numbers in post need to be included. In addition the procedure for reviewing carers needs to be detailed. Numbers of complaints and outcomes need to be stated.

1.5 The new Children's Guide from BAAF needs to include an insert with local information and has not yet been distributed as required by regulation.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

The pre-inspection questionnaire, self assessment document, inspection of personnel records, meeting with the staff team, meetings with foster carers and the interview with the service manager indicated that this standard continues to be met.

The service manager is advised to commence appropriate management training by 2005. (Standard 2.2)

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
---------------------------	---------------	---

Personnel files inspected indicated that this standard is met.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

All relevant procedures were made available to inspectors during the duration of the inspection. These included:

Supervision policy

Personnel files

Allowance Schedule

Carers files – the inspector was pleased to note that regular formal supervision of carers has now become established practice.

The standard is met.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The pre-inspection questionnaire, self assessment document, inspection of personnel records, job description, meeting with the staff team, meetings with foster carers and the interview with the service manager indicated that this standard continues to be met.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Health and Safety checks were evident on some files but it was not clear whether an annual inspection is being undertaken as part of the carer reviews.

All foster homes visited appeared to be appropriate and foster carers spoke about the need to maintain safe environments.

Contained within the recently distributed replacement foster carers handbook was a section on Health and Safety. However not all foster carers spoken were sure that they had received the new hand book.

The visiting of foster carers by NCSC Inspectors now forms part of the Foster Care Agreement and it was evident that the foster carers interviewed knew the purpose of the visits.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service continues to run the "Home from Home" scheme for the placement on a respite basis of children and young people with a learning and/or physical disability. However most of the users of the service receive day care only. The inspector was informed that only three children have overnight placements. However feedback about the way this service meets these children's diverse needs was positive.

Although there has been a strong campaign to recruit carers from minority ethnic groups which has resulted in many enquiries in the last 12 months, few new carers have been approved, with the result that there are still trans-cultural/ community placements.

Foster carers interviewed considered that they had generally been given appropriate advice and guidance in caring for children from a different ethnicity/ religion etc, providing examples of this.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)		
Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>In discussion with the staff team they acknowledged that when making short-term placements they continued to have difficulties identifying appropriate matches for all children and young people they were asked to place. For those children and young people trans-culturally placed the fostering service did provide additional support in the form of advice and allowances.</p> <p>There was a view in the agency that more appropriate matches are found for permanent placements when there is time to assess the child's needs and search for the 'right' carer and this was supported by the inspector's contacts with carers and inspection of the files.</p> <p>Foster placement agreements were not always evident on the carer's file but could be seen on the children's file. These took the form of LAC placement Plan part 1 and 2 which are not compliant with the Fostering Services Regulations. The fostering service is advised to provide an agreement form that meets the requirements of Schedule 6 of the Regulations.</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>The fostering service has a Safe Caring Policy along with policies covering bullying and unauthorised absences.</p> <p>Carers receive very basic initial child protection training routinely as part of their preparation and have the opportunity to attend further training at the now biannual carers conference. In addition they can access staff training in this area.</p> <p>Within the Foster Care Agreement a section states that corporal punishment is not acceptable. This message is further reinforced in the foster carers handbook.</p> <p>The inspector recommends that each carer's file contains a section on complaints and allegations that have been made in respect of carers – this is in addition to the file kept by the manager.</p> <p>The service does not collect information re: bullying and foster children and needs to address this.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

There was evidence from meetings with the staff team, foster carers and children that contact was promoted by the fostering service.

Since the last inspection a Contact Coordinator has been appointed to ensure that contact is properly set up, supervised and monitored. The manager informed that the co-ordinator and an agency staff member manage the week day contact. However staff and carers still reported difficulties which seem worse at weekends. There was concern about children being exposed to several different agency workers during a series of contact meetings – carers found that agency workers did not always produce ID. The safety and consistency issues need to be addressed by the service.

There is clearly a presumption by the agency that contact with family and other significant people is in children's interests.

There is now a risk assessment format in place and there was some evidence that risk assessments are undertaken before contact takes place.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

There was clear evidence that children attend LAC Reviews and that, from the interviews and questionnaires, some children and young people felt they were listened to.

The authority is now working closely with the Voice of the Child in Care - this organisation attended a Looked After Children Achievement day and brought along packs for the children and young people looked after by Slough Borough Council. An advocacy worker is still to be appointed.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)
The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

The service continues to employ, a nurse and a mental health nurse for Looked After Children. As before these two people from time to time attend the coffee mornings for foster carers and can be directly contacted by foster carers. These two health professionals have contributed to the local foster carers' newsletter. Furthermore one is a member of the Foster Panel.
 LAC documentation seen indicated that foster carers had copies of a child or young person's health record.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)
The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

The Looked after Children's Education Service (LACES) continues to provide individual support to children and young people in school and also the provision out of mainstream education.
 It has a data base of the educational placements, needs, and achievements of all the Borough's looked after children. As indicated above a LAC Achievement Day has been held to celebrate children and young people's achievements in the broadest sense.
 Carers and staff were familiar with the work of the team and had found them a valuable support.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)
The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

There has been little change since the last inspection when it was found that this standard needed attention. However the inspector was informed that training sessions in pathway planning have been attended by the LAC team and carers will also be trained.
 A new '16 plus' team is due to start in April which will take over the work contracted out to NCH at present.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The meeting with the staff team, research of a sample of personnel files, pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting with the fostering service manager indicated that this standard was largely met.

However the inspection of a sample of personnel files found that telephone follow-up of references in relation to a new appointment were not documented although the manager reported that they had taken place. This needs to be addressed. (Standard 15.3)

The service is reminded of the need to ensure a record is maintained of checks etc on sessional workers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

16

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

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Overall this standard was met. The staff team are well managed – supervised regularly and appraised annually (supervision files seen and staff views)

There are weekly team meetings which provide for group supervision, training, information exchange on developments in the service and carers.

Since the previous inspection administrative hours have increased and there is to be a new administrative appointment to the adoption and permanency team.

However staff continue to work in cramped conditions.

The service is reminded of the need to ensure that Standard 16.14 is adhered to.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The interview with the fostering service manager and the staff team indicated that there are still insufficient foster carers from ethnic minority groups. They have made strenuous efforts to remedy this in the last 12 months but the recruitment officer post has been temporarily vacant for some time.

The current staffing establishment is sufficient to meet the demands of the service and overall this standard is met.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There is now a local Out of Hours service for foster carers, operated by the staff team which is working well according to both staff and carers.

There is now a consistent approach to recording carer supervision although not all carers seemed to be receiving copies of the supervision record.

The service has now drawn up a whistle blowing policy for carers.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

As found at the previous inspection training is widely available within the authority and fostering staff also have access to external specialist courses. Opportunities for joint training with carers exist.

Staff are kept up to date with professional developments through the use of team meetings. New staff were satisfied with the induction process.

As before training profiles/needs are not obvious in the supervision files although some reference could be found in staff appraisals. The model now in place for carers could be usefully adapted for staff.

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

4

From the interview with the fostering service manager, the meeting with the staff team and inspection of supervision records and policies it was evident that the staff team continue to be very well supported and supervised.

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

3

Overall this standard is met.

The foster carers interviewed indicated that they were well supported by the fostering service but had mixed experiences of support from the children's social workers. They found that it was often difficult to contact these staff and that they did not always respond to messages left for them.

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

2

The foster carers interviewed indicated that they were well supported by the fostering service. However both staff and carers highlighted the difficulty of supporting carers who live some distance from the borough although it was evident that the fostering service tried to link such carers into local support services where possible, buying in as necessary

The foster care agreement has been updated but the inspector found an error which needs correcting (no reference to Foster Placement Agreement).

The inspector continued to find little evidence of unannounced visits to foster homes. It is recommended that the annual review form includes a requirement to list the unannounced visits.

The hand book has now been updated by purchasing a Fostering Network publication and adding local information and policies but it is recommended that the service checks whether additional information is needed for carers of young people over the age of 11 as the handbook is designed for under 11s.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The fostering service continues to provide pre-approval training for all foster carers with the exception of kinship carers.

Post approval there is a wide range of training available to foster carers within the authority but take-up is poor. Carers informed the inspector that they make applications for such training but receive a poor response. The fostering service manager is aware of this problem and believes that it will be remedied by the imminent appointment of a training officer specifically for social services.

The service has made the annual conference for carers biannual as attendance is high and a variety of training is offered at this event.

Foster carers are aware of the availability of NVQs and several of those interviewed had embarked on this.

Carers now have training records.

The service needs to look at core training needs post approval and how to ensure both carers in a two carer household attend this.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

The service has comprehensive policies concerning recording, record retention and storage.

Those carers interviewed indicated that generally they were receiving as much information as the social workers themselves had when an unplanned placement was made and that further information usually followed. Where planned placements were made the carer usually received full information.

Interviews with foster carers indicated that they had worked with children regarding issues to do with the children's past. Carers were aware of life story books and their role in contributing to these.

However children's files did not convey a sense of the child's history unless the file contained a Form E. Furthermore the child's legal status was not immediately apparent nor the purpose of their current placement.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

The administrative files were in good order and there was clear evidence of files being audited by managers.

This standard is generally met but the inspector advised that prospective carer files should be stored in the same area as approved carer files and not at individual work stations.

Also it is recommended that each carer's file contains a section on complaints and allegations that have been made in respect of carers – this is in addition to the file kept by the manager.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			43
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			42
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			8
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	105.74	Maximum £	323.44

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Overall this standard was met but the space allocated to the fostering service is still cramped.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
---------------------------	---------------

	9
--	---

N/A

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
---------------------------	---------------

	9
--	---

N/A

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The fostering service provider issued a schedule of allowances, which indicated that the foster carers are paid at the Fostering Network rates and in addition they receive a fee for the work they do as foster carers. Most carers were satisfied with both the rate and the methods of payment but some questioned the allowance paid for infants and children at home all day. The Fostering Manager informed the inspector that this matter is under review.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
---------------------------	---------------	---

The panel was observed and the chairperson interviewed. It was evident that the chair person is familiar with family placement issues and the needs of children. It was also evident that panel members take their role very seriously.

A foster carer from a different agency has been recruited to the panel and there are now up to date policies and procedures in place.

First reviews are now being presented to the Panel but carers still do not attend - it is planned that they will be invited in the near future.

The only shortfall identified was that the panel does not yet receive management information about the outcome of carer reviews nor is it monitoring supply and demand in relation to carers and children.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
---------------------------	---------------

The inspector interviewed the social worker on the Home from Home scheme and read the policy that outlined how this aspect of the service works. It is evident that partnership with parents is a key element in the success of placements .	
--	--

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
----------------------------------	----------------------	----------

Interviews with kinship carers indicated that the fostering service supports placements well both financially and in terms of social work intervention.

The fostering service manager stated that once approved all kinship carers were invited to all training produced by the service and carers interviewed confirmed this.

The authority has recently approved a new post to develop kinship care.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

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

Note:

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

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

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

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

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

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

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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