



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Park Foster Care Ltd

**Regent House
Beam Heath Way
Nantwich
Cheshire
CW5 6PQ**

Lead Inspector
Jeff Banham

Announced Inspection
12th June 2006 08:30

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 Park Foster Care Ltd

Address Regent House
Beam Heath Way
Nantwich
Cheshire
CW5 6PQ

Telephone number 01270 626562

Fax number 01270 625937

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Park Foster Care Ltd

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mrs Bridget Miltiadous

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The registered provider must, at all times, employ a suitably qualified and experienced manager who is registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection
2. The matters detailed in the attached schedule of requirements must be completed within the stated timescales

Date of last inspection 12th September 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

This information refers to the agency at the time of the inspection.

Park Foster Care is an independent fostering agency falling within regulation 4(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act 2000. It is constituted as a private limited company with a board of directors.

The agency provides placements with approved foster carers for children looked after by local authorities. Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved in order to enable the agency to provide placements to meet a range of needs for short, medium and long-term placements. Park also provides emergency, bridging and respite placements.

At the time of the site visit Park had thirty-two approved foster carers, providing a possible fifty-six approved placements. Thirty-two children were placed.

The agency's office is situated in Nantwich, South Cheshire, from where services are delivered and managed.

Park is an approved provider of fostering services with the West Midlands Child Care Consortium and the North West Authorities Consortium, and is also a member of the Fostering Network.

SUMMARY

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

The site visit took place over a week and included attendance at the fostering panel. The inspector was based in the main office of Park Foster Care for this visit. Written policies, procedures and records were examined. The files of six foster carers were read. These files were held in both paper and electronic form, on a computer-held database and case tracking system known as "Fostertrack."

The manager, responsible individual, finance director, four supervising social workers and one unqualified were interviewed in the office. Six foster carers, including one who was in the process of being deregistered, were visited in their own homes. Six children were spoken with. Survey questionnaires were received from 3 foster carers, 2 children and 2 placing social workers. The personnel files of the most recently recruited supervising social worker, one support worker, one temporary employee and one unqualified social worker were examined.

The inspector attended a meeting of the fostering panel and interviewed the chair of the panel.

Each "outcome area", or section, in this report contains a judgement about the quality of the service. This judgement is based on the examination of all available evidence, including the site visit.

The overall judgement is that the service provided by this agency is excellent.

What the service does well:

The agency is committed to providing effective and responsive support for carers. This commitment is translated into action, with all carers who contributed to the information in this report being very positive about the nature, quality and availability of support from all the agency's staff.

The agency is also clearly committed to child centred practice. Sound systems are in place to ensure there is a comprehensive approach to all aspects of placing and supporting children, and reviewing their progress.

The managers provide a clear sense of direction based on experience, a determined view of what is expected for looked after children, and a flexible and supportive approach to all staff and carers. All the agency staff, professional and administrative, are committed to the work of the agency in promoting effective childcare and efficient support for carers.

Staff adopt a positive, friendly and flexible manner in all of their work and people with whom they deal.

There is regular monitoring, review and updating of systems, policies and procedures. Children, carers and staff are all involved and contribute to the development of the agency.

Financial monitoring and is thorough and objective and supports the work of the agency in focussing on childcare matters.

The panel works effectively to provide independent scrutiny and overview of the agency's work. There is clear separation of the "business" aspect of the work of the agency from the primary focus on the needs of children placed.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has continued to recruit staff to ensure administrative functions are carried out efficiently, and there is a good ratio of social workers to carers. Additional support workers have been recruited to provide effective assistance to carers.

Policies and procedures have been updated in line with new information, developments in practice and research.

The manager has become involved in carrying out unannounced visits to carers.

There is a systematic approach to ensuring placing authorities fulfil their responsibilities to children placed. The manager and staff are clear about what is required to enable the agency to provide the most effective support for children.

What they could do better:

There is a need to improve the information available for children.

Social work staff need to be supported in undertaking health and safety assessments.

The independence and objectivity of the foster carer reviewing process could be better demonstrated.

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.

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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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Children's care plans address health needs well. Plans are regularly reviewed, updated and acted upon to produce good outcomes for children. The agency takes seriously its responsibilities for the health of children looked after and sound policies and practices are in place to support good practice.

EVIDENCE:

Information about children's health needs was obtained at the point of referral, or before the placement if it were an emergency. The manager said the information provided by placing authorities could vary for a number of reasons, and that the quality and quantity of detail may differ from time to time. These reasons included the extent of existing knowledge of the child by the local authority, the availability of the written information, or the ability of the placing authority to provide the information in good time. Park was clear in what information was required and what was needed to ensure carers could look after children properly.

The main source of information was the "*Looking After Children*" (LAC) documentation. Copies of these documents were held on the child's file and given to carers. Health information was identified in the matching report. One report said, "*Z. has grommets fitted into his ears. He is awaiting an audiology appointment as his hearing level is lower than average and he may need to have new grommets fitted.*" The report went on to say that the carer was aware of this "*....and will attend to Z's needs as appropriate.*"

There were cases where the information had not been provided within the required timescales. In these cases staff, both supervising social workers and the manager would make contact with the local authority in a variety of ways

including telephone calls, letters and e-mails to ensure the information was obtained.

One letter was written to the Team Manager of the authority placing a child. In it the manager of Park Foster Care expressed her concern at the amount of information that had been made available to the carer. The letter said:
"L. has not had a statutory medical since 13/12/04 and it was agreed the local authority would arrange one. L. told us he had asthma and has in the past used inhalers. We do not have a copy of the last medical and posses no information regarding his health needs."

A *"Foster Placement Agreement"* meeting was held early on in each placement as standard practice. This ensured that the main elements of health care were explicitly identified, together with carers' responsibilities. Copies of the foster placement meeting were held on file. These recorded the discussions that had taken place and the decisions made in respect of what people had to do.

Carers confirmed that children were registered with GPs, dentists and opticians, and that they were aware of their responsibilities for meeting any specialist health care needs. Consents for medical treatment were obtained and held on file.

Children's progress was monitored through the regular contacts between carers and supervising social workers, and through the statutory review process carried out for each child.

Healthy eating was promoted. One carer's supervision record said, *"X is encouraged to eat healthily. He has salad with every meal and eats chips once a week. A. ensures X. has a healthy packed lunch for school."*

The manager said that she had been concerned about support workers regularly taking children to fast food restaurants and the practice had been challenged.

The manager also recognised that there could be an improvement in the links with local health care agencies, and that work to overcome perceived resistance from some Cheshire health services to "out of area" children placed in Cheshire needed to be undertaken.

A medication/medical treatment/first log was held in the office. This noted all the treatments and medication that a child had received on a one-off or regular basis. The responsible individual monitored the information in the log.

At the time of the site visit the manager said that 69% of children and young people had had an annual health check. The remainder were children recently in placement, or young people who had refused. In these cases young people were offered advice and guidance from the nurse with specific responsibility for looked after children employed by the placing authority.

First Aid training was provided, and the local police had provided information on drug awareness to the carer's support group.

The manager said that further training under the "*Being Healthy*" framework was to be 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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Assessment reports are analytical and evidence based. Children's safety is central to the recruitment process and the panel has a clear role in matching children to placements. The one practice issue identified in this report concerns an oversight in implementing an effective and established system.

EVIDENCE:

Park Foster Care is a limited company managed by a board of directors, one of whom is the "responsible individual" as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The registered manager qualified as a social worker in 1986 and is experienced in childcare and fostering fields. She is undertaking NVQ Level 4 in management.

References and checks for all staff have been made in accordance with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. All staff have qualifications and experience relevant to their role, and all have received information about agency policies and procedures, and appropriate training. All staff undergo an induction and probationary period that is referred to in their contract of employment. A senior supervising social worker supervised one unqualified worker who was on a temporary contract.

Health and safety checks were carried out as part of the initial assessment and approval process. Information on health and safety issues was given to the panel as part of their consideration of applicants. Pet questionnaires were completed in appropriate cases. Health and safety issues were subsequently considered through the recorded supervision process, and in the annual review of foster carers. One supervising social worker said she was not as confident as she could be in the role of health and safety assessor. The issue of the availability of fire extinguishers and fire blankets was significant. It seemed from reports that these were not available in some homes when children were placed. This issue was identified at the fostering panel.

The manager agreed that the option of using a qualified independent assessor could be considered.

See recommendation 1

All of the homes that were visited as part of the site visit were well furnished and decorated, and children's rooms were decorated, equipped and furnished to a high standard. Children spoken with were very pleased with their rooms, which they clearly saw as their space that was important to them.

One foster carer was visited. He owned a 1000cc motorbike and said that the young person placed with him occasionally went on the bike with him. The issue had not been raised in the initial planning meeting, or in the carer's supervision held on the 18th May. The supervising social worker said that she had only recently been made aware of the issue, and agreed that it needed to be dealt with explicitly and recorded as part of safe caring guidelines.

Foster carers were approved mainly by sessional social workers under the supervision of the registered manager. Thorough assessments were carried under the standard "Form F" competency based framework by sessional social workers under the supervision of the registered manager. Copies of the assessments were held on file. Foster carers said the approval process had been "*professional*", "*demanding*" and "*extremely thorough*".

The fostering panel considered approvals, recommendations made and, where appropriate, approvals were made under specific categories. Carers were notified by letter of the approval and conditions. In most cases children were placed in accordance with the conditions of the approval. Some foster carer files contained reports of variations of approvals that had been presented to the fostering panel. Attached to these reports were the subsequent minutes of the panel discussion.

In one case, carers approved for "*one child, or sibling group of two, of either gender on a short-term or emergency basis*", were caring for a sibling group of three. There was no evidence that the carers' terms of approval had been reviewed or varied by the manager or the panel, or that there had been any

explicit consideration of a placement being made out of the original terms of approval.

See requirement 1

The matching of children with carers was carried out following referral. Placing authorities were given copies of foster carer assessments. A matching report was produced that highlighted a child's needs. If a match was to be considered a meeting was convened to discuss a proposed placement. If the placement went ahead a foster placement planning meeting was held and foster placement agreement report was produced. These were designed to ensure a child's needs were identified and that the foster carers had the skills and abilities to meet those needs. Social workers said that they were confident that the agency would ensure that a placement would be made only when it was in a child's best interests, and not simply to obtain another placement. The example was given of a single male carer approved for some months, and with whom a number of placements could have been made. He was however not used until the right match was possible. The young person subsequently placed has been in placement for over twelve months.

A "Referral and Placement Process Checklist and Action" form was completed for every placement, and this highlighted the actions that should be taken from referral to placement to ensure all the tasks and responsibilities associated with placement had been identified and undertaken.

Information about the content and significance of child protection issues was provided to carers as part of the initial approval and assessment programme. Carers confirmed that they were able to explore issues that may not have occurred to them, and felt that the "Skills to Foster" pack provided them with useful information. Training in child protection and specialist training in looking after children who have been sexually abused was provided as part of the core training programme for carers. The foster carer handbook provided information on the agency's child protection policy, child protection guidance and the local authority child protection procedures. Every carer visited had a copy of the handbook.

Information on incidents, allegations and notifications was held on a central record. Child protection issues were dealt with as part of the regular supervision process. The responsible individual monitored details of incidents of children missing from home. The record showed that there had been no allegations against carers but an allegation against the adult son of carers, who lived in the home, had been reported and dealt with by the agency and the placing authority.

The fostering panel was quorate and the membership appropriate to the task. The information provided for the agenda items was comprehensive, thorough and well presented. The subsequent discussions were detailed and focussed

on the issues relevant to the case. A couple applying to become carers attended the panel. They said that their dealings with Park Foster Care had been very positive. They said *"We have been impressed by the agency's professionalism at every stage. All staff have been prompt, positive and efficient. We cannot fault any aspect of the work of the agency."*

The Panel chair said he had never been concerned about the work of the panel being in any way affected by the "business" aspect of the agency. He was confident that all panel members remained independent and focussed solely on ensuring the interests of children remained central to their work. He was also confident that the relationship between the panel adviser and decision maker - they are husband and wife - was conducted at an entirely professional and objective level at all times. The discussions of the panel, and the way members raised issues relevant to each case, confirmed that belief. The chair said that the panel regularly receives information about applicants whose approvals have been terminated, assessed as not suitable, or have decided not to proceed.

Members of the panel agreed that they could develop a more systematic approach to providing a "quality assurance" perspective to the manager. This could be done by the identification of issues arising from each panel to be collated by the chair into a regular report to be provided to the agency.

See recommendation 2

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

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Park Foster Care ensures that all children are encouraged and supported to do well and reach their potential. The agency works hard to provide specialist help and support for all children and carers who need it. Staff and carers are supported and trained to support children through difficulties and to have a flexible approach to meeting children's needs.

EVIDENCE:

At the time of the site visit the information supplied by the registered manager indicated that of the eleven females in placement, eleven were white British; two of the 21 males were of mixed race, and one was black Caribbean. One young Chinese boy was placed immediately before the site visit.

The agency had an equal opportunities policy that was applied through recruitment practices for both staff and carers. The manager said that within the last twelve months assessments of two households had been discontinued because of concerns about racist views.

The complaints log showed that a complaint made by a foster carer about a comment made by a support worker had been upheld. Supervision of the worker had increased, and there was an expectation that the worker attended further training.

The foster placement agreement described the cultural needs of the young Chinese boy. He had lived in England for only eight months and little was known about him. The carers were aware of the importance of maintaining his contact with his own culture. They had ensured that he attended a primary school with a multi cultural perspective as it was near to a university. The carer said the child had been allocated a support worker in school who was helping him with his English as well as maintaining links with his home country through use of the Internet. Google "Earth Search" had been used to get pictures of his home town and his new home in England. The carers' children had used the computer at home to access Chinese news, and Chinese magazines had been obtained. The carer said they felt they needed to ensure the content of one magazine was appropriate before allowing him to have it. Trips to China Town in Manchester were planned.

The child's mother had said, via the social worker, that she wanted him to eat rice at every meal. The carer said he had said he wanted to try other food, and the carer said they were supporting that, whilst ensuring he continued to eat rice. The female carer said she had asked him to help her cook rice "properly."

The foster placement agreement said *"All the family were enthusiastic to learn more of X's culture and embrace aspects of this into their own lives."*

Training in valuing and promoting diversity was provided to all foster carers.

In the foster carer's handbook it was written that *"To promote the healthy growth and development of the child or children, with particular emphasis on health and educational achievement"* was one of a carer's core responsibilities. Information about children's educational needs was provided to carers through the LAC documentation and other sources. Matching considerations included educational issues, and they were explicitly discussed and recorded at initial placement planning meetings. A "Placement Planning Checklist" gave supervising social workers guidance on all the issues to be covered in drawing up the foster placement agreement. Educational issues were covered. Guidance on arrangements for meeting educational needs, the role of the parents, carers' responsibilities and the child's wishes was given.

Educational progress was monitored by the placing authority through the statutory review process, and by the agency through the regular carer supervision process. Carers confirmed that they were aware of their responsibilities for specific children, and that they recognised that educational progress was a vital area for children's achievement and feelings of self-esteem.

Support workers provided an additional resource for carers both with schools and extra-curricular activities.

Children spoken with said they went to school, were supported in going to school and helped with homework by carers.

One young person told the inspector that he had been "*expelled*" that day. The carer confirmed that she had only just found out that the child had been temporarily excluded. She was concerned that she had been told it was as a result of several days "*bad behaviour*" and she was not happy that the school had not informed her there were any problems until the exclusion had been made. The carer was clear that she would be taking the matter up with the school, as she wanted to be informed about everything that went on so that she and the school could work together effectively.

The supervision record for one carer said, "*Homework is a priority. M. will assist J. with his homework if it is needed and always encourages all the children in the family to achieve educationally.*"

Information provided for the site visit said that eight of the children placed by the agency had statements of special educational needs, no children were permanently excluded from school, and eighteen had a Personal Education Plan.

Although the agency has carers approved for short-term care there were no placements offering short term breaks for parents at the time of the site visit. Where carers offered planned or emergency respite to other carers within the agency this was done on a structured basis that ensured a child's need were met and consistency of care was maintained.

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 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The service is clear about the significance of contact. Care plans are clear in describing the actions of staff and carers in promoting contact. The manager is assertive in her dealings with placing authorities in ensuring a child's needs are identified and met. The service has invested in a number of ways in which children's views are obtained and they are encouraged to participate in all appropriate matters relating to their care.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements were discussed and established in written foster placement agreements. For example one agreement recorded that "*The children have not seen their mum once since being placed. Her whereabouts were not known. The children said they wanted to see their brother A, but not B. The social worker said the children were not allowed to see their father. Both children were aware of this. I (the manager of Park Foster Care) have subsequently spoken to the Team Leader regarding the LA's right to restrict contact.*"

Contact issues were also highlighted in the LAC documentation. Foster carers described the arrangements they made to support contact of children with families and other people significant to them. Placing authorities were asked to provide copies of documentation restricting contact. The file for one child contained a copy of a Prohibited Steps Order and a copy of a Residence Order, both made under Section 8 of the 1989 Children Act.

Information about contact issues was recorded by carers in their recording log. The recordings were examined by supervising social workers and contact issues were discussed in the regular supervision sessions. Contact was also a key area covered in the statutory review meetings.

The supervision record for one carer said, "B. is aware of the importance of working in partnership with the child's family. Y. has not had any contact with any family members yet. His contact should take place five times a year. B. will transport Y to the contact sessions as requested. He is willing to meet with family members and would wish to develop a positive relationship for the benefit of the child. B has facilitated contact between Y and the previous carers at Y's request."

The registered manager had taken action by writing to a placing authority where there were concerns over contact. A letter written on the 15th May said, *"At the placement agreement meeting L told me that his social worker had said she "owed" him several contacts. Whilst L. himself seemed to take this in good part I was disconcerted that his contact with family members was viewed in this way. I am also concerned that contact had been set during school hours necessitating L missing significant periods of education."*

Consultation took place with children at a number of levels. The child's views were noted and recorded in the placement planning meeting and before and during statutory reviews. The issue was raised during supervisory visits and, in the cases where the supervising social worker undertook child supervisory visits on behalf of a local authority. The child was also consulted every six months during placement and at the end of a placement using a questionnaire. One child had raised a number of issues about his placement when it had ended, and these had been dealt with as a complaint.

The advocacy service VOICE was contracted to provide a service for all children over eight who have been in placement for more than one month. These children were visited and the advocacy service explained to them. The manager said it was important that children were reminded that the service was available, and it was not just a "one off." Carers and children confirmed that they knew the advocacy service was available. The manager provided a number of examples of where action had been taken as a result of children's views being obtained.

The manager said that consultation with children was to be improved. The "Children's Guide " is referred to below under standard 1 "Statement of Purpose", and it was recognised that the development of a web-based children's guide and children's forum was an objective for the future.

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Allowances and expenses paid to carers enable them to achieve good outcomes for children. The system and rates for payments is subject to regular review.

EVIDENCE:

Park Foster Care had established clear rates of payment for foster carers. These rates were in part those decided upon by the agency itself, and others that were decided by placing authorities. General information concerning payments was provided to carers in the foster carer's handbook. Each April a letter was sent from the agency to each carer explaining any changes and providing updated rates of payment. The foster carer's handbook was subsequently revised.

The agency employed a part time administrative assistant to manage the payments to carers. There was a computer-based system to keep track of all payments to be made.

The registered person had written to all carers in April 2006. The letter contained a response to negative comments received from carers about some of the financial arrangements. The letter went on to say, *"We have taken the opportunity to review all our financial arrangements and make some significant changes. I have asked your supervising social worker to go through this with you but I will outline the main points below."*

The information covered topics such as the annual increase, respite allowances, payments for training, payments for training and payments for

support groups. The agency said it was planning to organise a conference for all carers in the near future, and that would provide a further opportunity for carers to discuss the issue.

All the carers spoken with said they were happy with the payments they received, they were paid on time, and that if there were any problems they would be resolved quickly.

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, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. There is a high level of awareness among manager and staff of what the service does well and where development is required. There is strong, consistent and appropriately qualified and experienced management, and managers are approachable and responsive whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries.

EVIDENCE:

The agency had a Statement of Purpose, revised in June, that provided comprehensive information about the service. The document was available to all carers and placing agencies. The agency had produced a Children's Guide. This was given to all children when they were placed. The document consisted mainly of text, and was given as a black and white photocopy. Two children spoken to said they did not know what it was, and one said he had not been given a copy. His foster carer was able to show him that he had a copy. Another child said "*I don't know*" when asked if she had been given a copy.

See recommendation 3

The agency has a robust system for monitoring and controlling its activities. It has produced a draft "Business Development Plan" that set out its intended activities for the period 2006 to 2009.

The responsible individual has established a system for monitoring the activities of the service in line with regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. He wrote an annual report and provided CSCI with a copy.

The Business Development Plan recognised that group events for foster carers need to be established on a more regular basis.

The agency is well managed. There are systems in place that provide all staff with clear guidelines on their activities and what is expected of them. All staff said that the manager and responsible individual are supportive, experienced and provide clarity and a sense of direction to the agency. Staff were particularly positive about the agency's commitment to child-centred practice, and that the "business" side was something that never interfered with the need to focus on child-centred practice.

All aspects of the work of the agency take place within structured guidelines that offer support to staff. Whole staff meetings and social worker team meetings take place on a regular basis and are recorded. The registered manager is supported by two senior supervising social workers. All staff receive regular recorded supervision, and support and supervision are provided at both a formal and informal level.

Staff said they felt that the "*hands on*" approach of the registered manager and the responsible individual (who were husband and wife) was positive, and that their style, philosophy and manner were fundamental in creating a stable and happy working atmosphere.

The responsible individual is responsible for carer recruitment and contractual arrangements with placing authorities. There are 100 hours of administrative support, including 15 dedicated to finance matters.

A particular strength of the agency is the commitment to child centred practice. Supervising social workers were clear about what the responsibilities of placing social workers were, and would take positive and effective steps if these responsibilities were not met. The agency has a standard letter identifying what documents are outstanding and asking if they could be provided as soon as possible. There were examples of Park social workers fulfilling the role of placing authority social workers where the latter were, for whatever reason, not able to undertake required tasks.

All of the agency staff, whether social workers or administrative, said that the agency was a good place to work, that the managers were *"easy going, laid back, but professional with it."*

The agency has a clear policy for the supervision and support of foster carers. Carers receive regular supervision through arranged meetings in their home. These visits are recorded and copies held on the electronic "Foster Track" database. The supervision covers issues to do with existing placements, foster carer's development, training and a brief assessment of carers' competencies, using the same framework as was used for the initial assessment.

Foster carers said that the support from all the agency's social workers was *"excellent"*. One said *"I had heard about them before I applied. They are even better than I was told."*

Another carer, looking after three siblings aged eleven, eight and seven, said *"I have worked for the NHS for over twenty years and I have never been so well looked after. I get more support from Park than I do from Social Services. They will come out at the drop of a hat."*

One carer gave the example of contacting the help line one evening, and the on-call social worker coming to her house. The social worker helped with the situation until late in the evening, and came back the following morning to check everything was settled.

Carers said that support was available at any time, whenever it was needed. New carers were "paired" with more experienced carers when they were first approved, and foster carer support groups met regularly.

The social workers employed by Park Foster Care also undertook work that was the primary responsibility of the placing authority where this had not been undertaken. One child had been placed with a carer on the 23rd March this year. The record of the supervisory visit to the child on the child's file said *"L's social worker is currently on long term sick leave and there have been no supervisory visits since the placement began."* The agency's supervising social worker had undertaken the visit on behalf of the local authority and sent a copy of the report of the visit to them.

The report also noted that “(The carer) *has not received all the necessary information from the local authority. The missing information has been requested by the agency on a number of occasions. The last statutory review took place in November 2005. No date has been received for the next review. This needs to take place as soon as possible so that long terms plans can be discussed.* ” The report noted that as a result of this Park had sent a letter to the local authority and the team manager was due to visit.

Foster carers received an annual review. Carers were informed by letter that the review was to take place, why it was taking place and how it was to happen. The letter referred carers to the Foster Carer’s Handbook. The reviews were recorded and presented to the fostering panel. The reviews consisted of a meeting between the supervising social worker, the manager and the carer. Given that the registered manager may be involved in the approval and support of any carer, either through direct contact or through supervision of the social worker, the introduction of a more “independent” reviewing process may be an advantage.

See recommendation 4

Park Foster Care also had a number of support workers. These were employed on a sessional basis and were used to provide an extra resource to carers, mainly by engaging in activities with children, and particularly by taking them outside of the home. These activities were agreed as part of the care plan, regular and structured. Children and carers said how valued and useful they were. Records of the session were completed by the workers and kept on the child’s file.

Since the last inspection the registered manager has started to undertake unannounced visits to carers. Records of these visits were kept on both the database and the carer file. These records showed that the visits covered issues such as health and safety, carer records and general placement issues. Carers confirmed that unannounced visits had taken place. Supervising social workers said they valued these visits conducted by the manager as they supported them in providing high standards of practice.

An out of hours call system was in operation. All social work staff staffed this on a rota basis. Contact with carers was recorded on the carer’s file from the supervising social worker using a distant access computer programme. All the carers spoken with said they knew the system was available, and that when they had used it the response was quick and effective.

Carers and children had a copy of the complaints procedure and confirmed they knew how to complain. There was a complaints log that recorded the details of any complaint and the outcome of any investigation. There were no outstanding complaints at the time of the site visit.

One carer had contacted the inspector to discuss the issues surrounding her de-registration. She was critical of the fact the agency had proposed to de-register her, and felt she had not been properly supported or fairly treated. The documentary evidence showed that the agency had acted appropriately at all times, had sufficient recorded evidence to consider deregistration, and was going through the proper procedure, including a presentation to panel.

There was a system for recording incidents of abuse or allegations, and records of notifications to CSCI and the local authority Safeguarding unit.

The personnel files of one newly recruited supervising social worker, one temporary unqualified social worker, one support worker and one temporary administrative assistant were seen. These files each contained an application form, references, proof of identity, evidence of qualifications and CRB checks.

Initial training for foster carers was provided as part of the approval process. It comprised of six sessions based on the "Skills to foster" programme. Carers said they enjoyed the training and found it useful. Some carers commented on how the initial training was part of the screening process, and that a number of prospective applicants would not proceed with their approval as a result of the information that was provided. An induction day was provided after approval had been obtained.

Core training for foster carers was provided on a regular monthly basis, and foster carers were informed by letter of the forthcoming sessions. The sessions were held on the last Friday of the month and included topics such as *"safe caring"*, *"promoting equality and diversity"*, *"child sexual abuse"*, *"playing your part in planning care"* and *"recording for carers."* The core programme was to be completed within twelve months of approval, and "catch-up" sessions were available to partners of main carers. Foster carers said the training was useful and relevant to their work with children.

Specialist courses were also provided. One such course was *"Men who foster."* Social workers said that carers could access particular courses if there was a need in meeting a particular child's needs. One example was of a carer on a six-week course on attachment, as it was important to the needs of the child placed with her.

The agency has a training incentive scheme. If carers attend seven support groups and seven training groups they receive a "reward package." Records and certificates of training courses attended were held on carers' files and training was a regular topic covered in supervision sessions

Training was available for staff. Supervising social workers said they had attended the *"Competency based assessment training"* even though assessment and approval of carers was not a routine part of their job. They

had also attended training on Carer supervision". Other training was available if identified.

Each carer and each child had a case file containing a standard structure for the organisation of records. The files were well maintained. Where documents were not available there was written evidence that attempts had or were being made to obtain these. This normally entailed contact with the placing authority.

Carers were required to keep daily records on children placed. These were examined by supervising social workers, and carers received training in recording practice. One carer had entitled the record "*L's story*" and read it to the young person every night. The record contained photographs and other items that reflected the child's life with the carer.

The agency had recently introduced a "Four monthly return" that was to be completed by carers. This consisted of a detailed breakdown of specific issues, information and tasks associated with the "*5 Outcomes*" for children. If completed properly it would provide a comprehensive summary and review of activity, behaviour and progress for each child placed.

The agency maintained all administrative records in the office. These were kept in a combination of "hard" copy and computer based systems. Specialist administrative staff maintained all the records and they were monitored by the responsible individual who also prepared a report under Regulation 42.

The agency recognised that new office premises were required. The number of staff had increased considerably since registration, and there were additional administrative records that were needed in keeping with the growth in numbers of carers and children placed. Staff said they appreciated the fact that working together in one office promoted a feeling of "*togetherness*" and that it promoted the feeling of "*....everybody working together*". Although the premises were regarded by staff as suitable, the manager was in the process of looking for more permanent space in a new location.

The premises were secure, and all records were kept in lockable cabinets of password-protected computer systems. Back-up information was maintained so that all records were protected.

The agency had a Finance Director who was responsible for the accounts, financial planning, and the provision of information to the manager and responsible individual. He had been involved in the preparation of the Business Development Plan that set out the development of the agency up to 2009. Regular financial reports were presented to the Board of Directors.

The Finance Director was able to demonstrate that the business was financially viable and had sufficient money to fulfil its obligations. The agency had clear

documented financial procedures that included contingency arrangements should it be projected that the business was likely to become insolvent. These procedures set out the arrangements for ensuring the stability of existing placements and the continued provision of support to the foster carers.

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	3

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

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

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

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

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

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	FS8	28(2)(b)	The manager must ensure that a system is in place for all variations in foster carer approvals are approved by the panel	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.	FS6	The manager could ensure that all health and safety assessments of foster carer's homes are undertaken by people trained to do so.
2.	FS30	The manager could ensure that she receives a regular quality assurance report from the panel chair.
3.	FS1	The manager could review the Children's Guide to ensure it provides key "child-friendly" information.
4.	FS21	The manager could ensure that reviews of foster carers are conducted with independent scrutiny.

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