



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

North Lincolnshire Council Fostering Team

**The Grove
38 West Street
Scawby
Brigg
North Lincs
DN20 9AN**

Lead Inspector
Ms Matun Wawryk

Announced Inspection
13th to 24th February 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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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 North Lincolnshire Council Fostering Team

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Scawby
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DN20 9AN

Telephone number 01652 656005

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Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) North Lincolnshire Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Miss Pauline Ruth Stormont

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 29th November 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

North Lincolnshire Council provides the service.

The service aims to provide a range of high quality foster placements to meet the needs of the Looked after Population of North Lincolnshire Council.

A service manager leads the service; a team leader has day-to-day management responsibilities for the service. The team leader is supported by a well-qualified and experienced team of family placement officers and a dedicated administrative team.

The service is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training, support and development of all its foster carers. There is a single fostering panel.

The service provides a variety of foster placements including: mainstream fostering, long-term fostering, contract care, single placement care and short-term breaks. The service caters for children and young people aged 0 – 18 years.

The service operates out of premises situated in a village near to Scunthorpe. No adverse comments were received from foster carers regarding the buildings accessibility. The building lends itself to foster carer training and or formal/informal meetings and groups

Statistical information provided identified a reduction in the number of Looked After Children from the last year, resulting from an increased emphasis being placed on family support.

SUMMARY

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

One inspector carried out the inspection over eight days between the 13th and 24th February 2006. Five foster carers and children and young people placed with them were visited in their homes.

Questionnaires were sent out to children, foster carers and placing authority social workers. Interviews were held with the team manager, four family placement officers, a family placement assistant and the joint chairs of the local foster care association. The also inspector also attended a foster panel meeting.

A number of professionals who have contact with the fostering service were also interviewed. This included an educational representative and the fostering panel chair. A children's participation group was also attended. In addition the team manager also submitted a portfolio of evidence and completed a pre inspection and self-assessment questionnaire.

What the service does well:

The fostering team are to be commended for the quality and scope of the pre inspection material provided to the Commission.

The service is well managed and has an experienced team, which provides a good level of support to foster carers, children and young people

The evidence gathered from children and foster carers interviews and questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with services received and provided by the fostering service.

The fostering service ensures children and young people's health care needs are met. The fostering team works well with health professionals to ensure that children and young people receive the information and support they need. Foster carers and staff said that they felt supported by the health services offered.

The fostering team works well with the education teams and services to ensure children and young people receive the opportunities they need to succeed. Children and young people are supported to attend school and encouraged to achieve their potential. Homework clubs and computers are provided for all children in foster care. If children and young people are excluded from school then the fostering and education teams ensure that schoolwork is continued out of the classroom.

The systems for recruiting and supporting staff and foster carers are well developed and are supported by sound policies, procedures and practice guidance.

Feedback from foster carers interviews indicated that they were informed about the complaints procedure and how to use it. This was also the view of children who the inspector spoke to.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The fostering service had cleared the back of annual and three years reviews for foster carers.

The Authority had reviewed and increased allowances and payments to foster carers and intends to further increase allowances in the forth-coming year to bring these further in line with national recommended allowances.

The service continues to improve the way in which it consults with children and young people. For example, the authority has changed the children's review form in the light of feedback from young people.

Arrangements for preparing young people for adulthood had been strengthened.

What they could do better:

The fostering service must carryout the same vetting procedures for internal appointments

The service must ensure only qualified social workers carryout supervisory visits to foster carers

The service must develop safe care plans for each foster carer household. These must be agreed with the child's social worker and discussed with the child or young person.

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

The fostering service has developed strong partnership with health professionals and actively promotes the health and development of children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is commended for promoting development and health opportunities for looked after children. The team works in a multi-disciplinary way in order to secure positive outcomes for children in this area.

The healthcare needs of children and young people are addressed at the initial referral stage and form part of the matching process. Placement plans set out each child's health care needs and provides the foster carer with any necessary background information. The Foster Carer handbook provides detailed guidance on carer responsibilities regarding health and gives advice on ways to promote the health of children and to ensure their safety.

In interview foster carers reported that they generally received good quality and timely information concerning a child's health care needs. In interview foster carers demonstrated a clear understanding of their role in promoting the health and development needs of young people. Evidence of carers fulfilling their health care responsibilities to children placed with them was seen on files and other documentation examined.

The fostering service has access to specialist medical advisors to who it can refer children to for individual advice and consultations and there is medical representation on the fostering panel. The service holds regular health information days, which are intended to be both informative and fun.

Post approval care training includes health needs of children and young people, first aid and sexual development and health.

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 & 30

A suitably qualified and experienced manager manages the fostering service. The service ensures the emotional and physical safety of children and young people through a range of systems, policies, procedures and practices.

EVIDENCE:

Corporate policies and procedures are in place for recruitment and selection of staff. In interview staff commented that they considered the local authority and their managers to be a fair and competent employers.

The systems for recruiting staff and foster carers are well developed and are supported by sound policies, procedures and practice guidance.

Evidence from a review of a sample of staff personnel records demonstrated sound recruitment and selection practices for externally appointed staff. Procedures need to be followed that ensure internal transfers and appointments comply with vetting requirements.

The team manager has significant child-care experience and holds a recognised social work and management qualification. The team manager is supported by an experienced and well-qualified staff group, which is supported by an effective administrative team

The foster carer homes visited during the inspection were clean and comfortably furnished. All homes are inspected by the fostering social worker as part of the initial assessment and annual review process. Records confirmed that checks are carried out on foster carers MOT and insurance certificates on an annual basis. Foster carer preparation and training covers health and safety issues.

From interviews with foster carers and evidence of the initial training and other training provided to foster carers, it was evident that foster carer training covers children who have been abused and safe caring skills. Foster carers are provided with a copy of the Fostering Networks 'safe caring' booklet, although individual safe care guidelines for each foster care household had not been developed. Good practice would indicate the need to develop and provide individual safe caring guidelines.

The training and assessment of carers includes guidance on corporal punishment and other forms of inappropriate control or punishment. In discussion with foster carers, it was evident that they had a knowledge and understanding of the issues and concerns about bullying. A procedure on dealing with bullying in foster care was available.

A written procedure on children missing from care was available. Foster carers spoken to confirmed they had been provided with copies of this guidance. Foster carers stated they understood what to do if a child goes missing from home should this occur.

The systems for recruiting, training and supporting staff and foster carers were well developed and were supported by sound policies, procedures and practice guidance.

Children are placed with carers on the basis of a matching process. Interviews with family placement officers demonstrated that lengthy discussions take place between different professionals about the needs of children in order to make matched placements. The service had written guidance on matching children to placements and a written record of matching considerations was produced. Records examined identified some matching considerations were not well recorded and the fostering service needs to look at ways of improving this.

Not all children placed have their own bedrooms, the fostering service needs to ensure a child's need for space and privacy is assessed and systematically recorded as part of the matching process.

The inspector met with the independent panel chair, and observed a panel meeting. The Fostering Panel policies and procedures reflected the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards in terms of practical, organisational and legal implications in respect of membership and practice.

Meetings of the panel are formally recorded and decisions/recommendations are placed on the relevant foster carer's file. Past panel minutes examined as part of this inspection were comprehensive and consistently recorded.

Arrangements were in place for the panel to receive service information on a quarterly basis.

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 & 31

The service promotes the racial, religious and cultural identity of children as far as practicable and gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of children and young people to help them to achieve their potential.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people are provided with opportunities to achieve their potential by the fostering service. Diversity is valued and children and their families have access to a care service that recognises needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

Feedback from family placement officers and foster carers showed a child's feeling of self worth is encouraged and foster carers are encouraged to develop an understanding of self-esteem issues through their initial and subsequent training. The inspector advises that supervision records are maintained more systematically to reflect the breadth of issues and matters discussed during supervisory meetings.

Evidence gathered from records and discussions with a range of personnel showed Looked After Children's health and education teams worked in partnership with the fostering service. Demonstrating a holistic ethos to the needs of children and young people.

In interviews, staff and foster carers gave some positive examples of ways of working to ensure that the cultural and religious needs of children are met. Fostering staff said foster carers are proactive in seeking out resources that will meet a child's religious and cultural needs.

The area does have large ethnic minority populations, and two children had been placed cross culturally. Fostering staff were aware of the importance of ensuring resources and information are available to assist foster carer to meet the cultural and religious needs of children and young people placed.

The inspector was advised that family placement officer supervisory visits also covered a range of associated issues to ensure that children's overall needs are consistently met. As previously noted, supervisory records need to better reflect the full range of issues discussed.

Evidence demonstrated that the fostering service places high priority to meeting the educational needs of children and young people and works in an integrated way with the looked after children's education team. Children are encouraged and supported by the fostering service to achieve their potential. This is achieved on a day-to-day basis by the foster carers work with children.

In interview foster carers demonstrated understanding of the importance of their role in promoting the education development of children and young people by attending parents evenings and open days. Children are also have the opportunity to attend homework clubs, and resources are available for supported learning during school days should a child be excluded from school.

The fostering service provides children and young people with computers. Information systems are in place to demonstrate the educational attainments of children and young people.

Over the last year there has been positive developments in promoting and celebrating achievements. For example, children and young people receiving foster care have been involved in the production of a DVD discussing their achievements whilst in foster carer and other events celebrating achievements. These are areas of good practice and the teams are to be commended.

The service provides short-term breaks/respite to support parents with disabled children and the service had recruited specific foster cares to provide such placements. In addition the service offers respite to other foster carers.

Evidence from records and discussions with various staff indicates the fostering service and foster carers work in partnership with families to provide respite care for children with disabilities. The service recognises the central role of birth parents. The inspector met with a foster carer offering respite care, she reported that she was very satisfied with the support she received and information supplied indicated positive relationships with the birth parents.

Assessments are carried out to look at specialist equipment needed and provided where possible.

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

The fostering service actively promotes and supports contacts with family and friends thereby ensuring children and young people maintain links with family and friends.

The fostering service actively consults and works closely with children and young people enabling them to have a say on matters affecting their daily lives

EVIDENCE:

It was evident from the Skills to Foster training programme, the foster carer handbook and feedback from interviews with foster carers that the importance of contact is made clear to foster carers in their training and support from the family placement officer's reinforces this. Transport and financial assistance are provided for children to maintain contact with their families.

In interview foster carers demonstrated a clear understanding of their role in supporting contacts with family and friends. Children and young people's files examined clearly set out contact arrangements.

The staff in the fostering service spoke of good relationships with children's social workers and this view was shared by placing social workers who responded by questionnaire. Mechanisms were in place for family placement officers to feed back issues to social workers.

Children are given the opportunity through the reviewing process to air their views on the care they receive. This is also encouraged in participation groups

that children and young people can attend and contribute to. Children and young people had been involved in a number of projects including making a DVD of their achievements in foster care. The inspector attended a meeting of the 'Garage Patch Kidz' participation group, which provides an excellent forum for children and young people to air their views and to be heard.

Feedback from the children who attend this group indicated they knew about the complaints system and how to make a complaint and contact their social worker. Complaints are handled appropriately by the service and an advocacy service is provided and available to children.

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

Significant improvements have been made to the fee structure and allowances paid to foster carers bringing payments more into line with National recommended allowances.

EVIDENCE:

Since the last inspection the local authority had increased allowances and remunerations paid to foster carers by 21% and further increases are planned for 2006.

In interview all of the foster carers stated that payments and allowances were paid on time. Where errors occurred these were speedily dealt with. Foster carers welcomed the increases in allowances and remunerations, but comments from some foster carers indicated a need for further increases to cover the full cost of caring for each child.

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, 2, 4, 17, 18, 20,21, 22, 24, 25 & 32

The Fostering Service is managed competently with an organisational structure that fits its geographical and service demand profile. There are sufficient numbers of staff to support and develop the foster carers. A strong administrative team supports the service.

EVIDENCE:

Management arrangements were found to be robust, organised and well integrated. Roles and responsibilities within the team are clearly defined and understood.

The statement of purpose clearly sets out the services provided and has been updated to reflect recent management and staff changes. A children's guide is provided. The children's guide was being updated with the involvement of young people, to further meet the age range and needs of children and young people in foster homes.

In interview the manager reported that matters to be monitored under Schedule 7 were primarily monitored through the various systems for Looked After Children/Quality Protects and national performance monitoring systems. The inspector saw evidence of this during the inspection. The manager made available to the inspector a range of performance and quality assurance monitoring information. The team is to be commended for the quality and scope of information provided.

Staff have access to good support, supervision and training. Staff were well informed and have access to all required policies and procedures. In interview the fostering team manager and staff indicated that there were sufficient numbers of qualified workers to carry out their full range of duties and responsibilities. With the exception of one worker all the social workers in the fostering team are professionally qualified.

Feedback from foster carers and records examined showed foster carers received a good level of support from the fostering team. All of the foster carers interviewed and those who returned a questionnaire stated they felt valued by the team.

Records and discussions with foster carers evidence they were seen on a regular basis. One unqualified worker was carrying out supervisory visits. The regulations require supervisory visits to be carried out by suitably qualified workers only.

Foster carers were very positive about the support that they receive from the fostering team. Foster carers stated they felt valued by the fostering team, foster carers said that they just had to pick up the phone and they could speak to anyone if their family placement officer was not there. Foster carer agreements are in place and in line with regulation. There are clear systems in place for practically supporting carers which carers were well informed about

Structures are in place to ensure that assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are maintained and implemented effectively and there has been a notable improvement in the reviewing of carers since the last inspection.

Multi disciplinary relationships are well maintained and there is evidence of good working together in order to achieve placement consistency to meet the needs of children. Fostering service social workers understand clearly their role and that of the social worker. Clear processes for the assessment of carers are in place and feedback from the panel chair indicates improvements over the past year.

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. Foster carers are provided with detailed information in their handbook about a range of topics, which are regularly updated. This means that foster carers are kept well informed and enabled to look after children well.

Carers are aware of complaint process and complaints are monitored. The fostering service monitors allegations of abuse and individual support to carers if an allegation is made is provided by family placement officers, independent advocates and through membership of the fostering network which provides legal advice.

There is a detailed recording policy, which establishes the format of child and foster carer files. Foster carers work with children to ensure that they have an understanding of their situation. Foster carers where appropriate and after receiving advice and training undertake life story work and understand the importance of building up a life picture for the child. The service provides and accesses advice and support for foster carers when working with complex issues.

In interview foster carers stated that they were given the necessary equipment to care for the children they look after. Foster carers visited held information on children appropriately ensuring its storage in a secure place. Foster carers were aware of the need to maintain confidentiality.

The fostering service keeps all the appropriate records as identified in regulation. Foster carers and children's records examined were well maintained and comprehensive. The service approves a number of joint carers. To comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1988, in particular the right of individual data subjects to have access to their records, the fostering service should ensure foster carers sign to say they agree to their records being held together.

It was evident from the interview with the fostering service manager and family placement officers and records seen, that the service does recognise the contribution of family and friend foster carers and endeavours to provide for their training and support needs in a sensitive way. The assessment for kinship carers was provided in ways consistent with the training and support of other foster carers.

Feedback from staff interviews and questionnaires highlighted that some kinship carers are reluctant to take up training opportunities. The fostering service needs to look at ways of addressing this.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
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	3
2	4
4	3
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	3
19	X
20	4
21	3
22	2
23	X
24	3
25	3
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

Yes

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	FS22	20(3)(b)	The fostering service must ensure supervision of foster carers is undertaken by suitably qualified social workers	30/05/06
2	FS15	20	The fostering service must ensure required vetting procedures are followed for internal candidates	24/03/06

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	FS9	The fostering service should develop and make available individual safe care guidelines for each foster carers household

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