



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Wigan Social Services Dept Fostering Service

**Hesketh Meadow
196 Newton Road
Lowton
Warrington
Cheshire
WA3 2AQ**

Lead Inspector
Sarah Oldham

Key Announced Inspection
4th September 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Wigan Social Services Dept Fostering Service
Address	Hesketh Meadow 196 Newton Road Lowton Warrington Cheshire WA3 2AQ
Telephone number	01942 487200
Fax number	01942 487211
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Wigan Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Paula T Jones
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 14th November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Wigan Social Services Department's Fostering Service provides care and accommodation through recruited foster carers to a large number of children and young people using public care. Placements with family/friend foster carers provide a valuable service to children and young people enabling them to remain within their own families or extended networks. Family network foster carers provide short term breaks for children, young people and their families who require this specialist service. The service aims to work ' with flexibility to meet the diverse needs of children '...providing ' training and support to foster carers to enable them to offer a competent, safe and caring service.'

The service has a team manager who manages both fostering and adoption services

At the time of the inspection the total number of approved fostering household was 197 providing support to 246 children and young people. In the previous year the service had approved 11 new carers.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was announced and was undertaken by two inspectors over five days. The inspection included an interview with the team manager of the service, family placements workers for both 'recruited carers' and family and friend carers, the manager of the independent reviewing team, the panel chair and the senior manager of the after care team, the homes of carers and some young people living within foster placements. These young people and carers were visited as part of the inspection process.

Information the service keeps about foster carers and young people was looked at. A large number of questionnaires were sent out to young people and their carers and their views about the service have been included within this inspection report.

The personnel files of five members of staff were inspected and a sample of complaints and allegations were viewed.

Prior to the inspection the manager completed pre inspection documentation providing additional information regarding the service. This along with information received from the service since the last inspection and recorded on the Commission for Social Care (CSCI) file on the service has been included as part of the inspection.

What the service does well:

The manager and staff met during the inspection presented as skilled, committed and experienced in family placement. Over the past twelve months the recruitment of staff has resulted in the team meeting the staffing levels assigned to it with the exception of a part time vacancy, which was in the process of being advertised.

The fostering service completes comprehensive Form F assessment forms regarding potential foster carers that are submitted to the fostering panel prior to approval of carers. The panel minutes viewed demonstrated that the Panel members were confident about examining these forms to enable them to ask the right questions to assess the suitability of carers. Annual reviews of foster carers were also completed and decisions made recorded in the panel minutes.

Most carers who responded to the questionnaires felt that the service that they received was generally very good, carers who were visited confirmed this. Their comments included " I have fostered for the authority for a number of

years and have always felt very well supported by our family placement worker and also the support workers". " I have never had any problems and the support and advice I have received has always been excellent".

The foster carers met at this inspection demonstrated that they were able to provide a good service to the young people placed with them. They confirmed that they had received most of the Looked After Children (LAC) documentation prior to the young person being placed with them and that they received both announced and unannounced visits from their family placement worker.

The young people completing the questionnaire and those spoken to felt that their care needs were being met. Comments included " I feel really happy here", "I want this to always be my home" and "I feel safe and well looked after".

There is now a group of staff within the family placement team dedicated to working with family and friends carers, this has ensured that assessments and reviews have been undertaken.

Foster carers also said that they felt able to discuss with their family placement worker issues that may have occurred.

Foster carers felt that they were also supported well by the support workers within the fostering service. Support workers worked flexible hours and provided a service until eight each evening as well as providing support at weekends.

What has improved since the last inspection?

As previously mentioned the fostering service is now fully staffed and the team is committed to providing support to both recruited foster carers and family and friend carers. The development within the family placement team of staff dedicated to working with family and friend carers has enabled the assessments of these carers to be undertaken and the review of arrangements to progress.

Groups have been developed for consultation. One group specifically for carers and one for young people. Barnados facilitated the children and young peoples group and minutes of these meetings were available. The groups also had written aims and objectives. Young people said that they felt that they were consulted and listened to.

The service had developed the consultation group for carers and was holding a series of meetings across the authority for carers. A number of carers had confirmed that they had been invited to these but had not taken the opportunity to attend in the first instance but were now considering attending further meetings.

Reviews for children and young people in placement have been developed and there were several options available for the children and young people to be involved in their review if they did not wish to attend. These included communication via email, 'text' messages and telephone. Young people spoken to said that they felt that their views were listened to and they were involved in decisions about them.

What they could do better:

The manager and staff of the service were aware that they needed to focus on the recruitment of foster cares for Black and Ethnic minority communities. Plans were being developed to promote recruitment and the plans were waiting approval from senior management.

The children and young persons social work teams kept the children and young peoples files. As part of the inspection process a sample of files were examined. Some of the files inspected were not in specific order and although the team manager had audited the files and it had been identified that documents were missing from the files no action had been taken to address this matter. In the case of one young person's file examined it was unclear the reasons why this young person had been placed with their carer.

The health care needs of the children and young people were promoted by the fostering service although some young people had not had a recent Looked After Children (LAC) medical.

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 quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

The fostering service provides training and support to enable foster carers to promote the health and development of young people in their care.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service makes it clear to foster carers the expectations placed upon them to meet young peoples' health needs. This is discussed with prospective foster carers at the initial information meetings, during the skills to foster training and detailed in the Foster Carer Handbook and information pack. The service supported carers with promoting the health and wellbeing of the child in placement. Supervisory visits were undertaken both on an announced and unannounced basis.

All children and young people were registered with a General Practitioner (GP), Dentist and other health care professionals. Carers who completed questionnaires and those that were interviewed were aware of the need to support and promote the young person's health care needs. This included awareness of healthy eating and the importance of health promotion. One young person spoken to said " if I don't feel well my carer looks after me and helps me get better".

There was evidence that some health care assessments had been completed, however on two of the files viewed, health care assessments were not fully completed. This was discussed with the carers and staff of the service and it was acknowledged that some young people chose not to attend health care reviews. It is however important to encourage and promote the health care needs of the children and young people.

Those health care assessments viewed that had been completed gave a comprehensive overview of the young persons health care needs. Carers said that they had received appropriate information about the health care needs of the young person placed with them although details of immunisations that the young person had received were not always recorded on the LAC documentation.

The supervising family placement worker also used visits to monitor young peoples' health care needs.

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

The quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

There are appropriate systems in place to check the suitability of potential foster carers, to ensure safe and appropriate matching.

Training for foster carers promotes the safety and well being of the child/young person.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the fostering service has a number of years experience working within the family placement service and has been in the role of manager for the past two years. The service has a deputy manager and two senior practitioners who supported the manager. Staff roles were clearly defined with appropriate arrangements in place for the management of the service.

Systems were in place to ensure that enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures for all carers and staff were undertaken every three years.

Before and during the inspection the manager provided details about the service and the developments undertaken and those that were planned.

The carers met during the inspection and those who contacted the inspectors by phone presented as skilled, competent carers who were caring appropriately for the young people placed. The homes of foster carers visited by the inspectors appeared to provide adequate and safe environments for children and young people. One young person spoken to said " I am really happy here. I have a really nice room and I chose how I wanted it decorated". Another said "I feel happy here and want to stay here forever"

All of the foster carer files inspected had a Safe Care policy in place and carers were aware of their role and responsibilities in promoting the safety and well being of the children and young people placed with them. The service provided training and written information with regards the protection of children. Carers spoken to demonstrated an understanding and an awareness of these issues.

At the time of the inspection the law with regards young people travelling in cars had just been introduced. Information had been provided to carers and where identified, car seats for children had been provided.

The recruitment of foster carers continued with applications to be foster carers in the region of one hundred within the past year. Due to the high number of applications and the number of staff within the team it was noted that from initial application to approval could take up to eighteen months. The manager said that the service had prioritised the assessment of carers to meet the needs of the young people awaiting placements.

The service used the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) matching checklist as part of the form F assessments plus the knowledge of the carer and information about the young person to ensure that the child/young person was placed appropriately taking into account the cultural, ethnic racial and religious needs of the young person. The manager had identified in the pre-inspection information and during the inspection that there was a lack of Black and Ethnic minority carers. To address this, the authority had planned specific recruitment strategies and had worked closely with other local authorities across the North West to increase awareness of the fostering service needs for Black and Ethnic minority carers.

The service recruitment and selection procedures for appointing new staff follow good practice guidance in safeguarding children. Four staff files were randomly selected and found to contain appropriate application forms, references and previous experience to ensure that the staff had the skills and qualifications to undertake their role. All staff had enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures that were renewed every three years.

During this inspection the fostering panel was not observed, however, minutes of the panel meetings and the decisions made were inspected. These were found to be clear and detailed in full with the outcome of decisions made and the process involved. The Chair of the fostering panel was also interviewed and

provided information about the process undertaken. The panel did not however, conform to the Fostering Regulations 2002, as it did not have a current elected member on the panel. This was discussed with the Panel Chair and a requirement has been made.

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 quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

Training programmes had been developed and the service recognised that diversity is an area for improvement.

Children and young people were supported to attend education Partnership and consultation through the services was seen to play an important role in providing services for young people.

EVIDENCE:

The service had identified that further carers were needed from Black and Ethnic minority groups. To address this issue, the service had worked closely with other local authority fostering services' across the North West and had also developed a recruitment strategy to address this issue. Procedures were in place to support children and young people from Black and Ethnic minority communities groups in the interim period. In addition to this the service has identified that additional carers for older teenagers was also required. Applications from prospective foster carers who wish to foster older teenagers had been given priority to meet the needs of the young people needing support.

The service also provides short-term breaks for a small number of children and young people with complex needs. Specialist equipment e.g. portable ramps, bathing aids and hoists are all provided by the service. Family network carers were recruited in the same way as with other recruited foster carers but they were supervised and supported by a separate team.

Family network carers receive training specific to the needs of the children and young people. Parents remain central to the promotion of their own child's health and education.

The service supports children and young people with their education. The service has put additional resources and strategies in place to support education. These include promoting the educational care and support provided by foster carers to enable them to support a young person with their school homework. A training course for foster carers "A Better Education for Children in Care" providing information on education has been attended by many of the carers. Those carers that responded to the questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection identified that this was a very positive course. One carer said that it had "helped me have a greater understanding regarding education. It is some years ago that I attended school and things change". Young people said that they felt that they were supported with their educational needs.

The service supports carers to attend meetings at school and also promotes education from through pre approval training, foster care agreement and supervisory visits. Carers spoken to felt that they received a good level of support from the school

The manager said that most children and young people have a 'Personal Education Plan' (PEP). The files inspected contained PEPS. These contained information about the individual child/young people's educational needs. The documents were completed well and contained relevant information. Carers and young people spoken to said that they had been involved in the development of these.

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 quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

The service ensures that children and young people receive adequate contact with families and that this is supported by the foster carer's.

The young people accessing the service are consulted and participate in the development of services and information for young people in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements for the children and young people were a high priority for the service and were a planned and shared responsibility. The service had a team of support workers that support and facilitate contact for some of the children and young people in placement. Foster carers spoken to were also aware of the importance of maintaining contact and discussed how they individually supported contact for the young people placed with them. Foster carers also said the arrangements that the service had in place met the needs of the children/young people. Young people spoken to or who responded to the survey confirmed that they were happy with their individual contact arrangements, no one reported any issues or concerns relating to supporting and maintaining contact.

The consultation groups developed to support young people undertaken by Barnardos had been very successful. Newsletters had been produced by the young people and distributed. Further events were being planned. Questionnaires received from young people indicated that they felt that they had the opportunity to say how they felt and how things were for them.

The review process had also been developed to enable young people to have a number of ways to be involved in their review. For those young people who didn't physically wish to attend their review they could contact the independent review team by telephone, email or text. One young person spoken to said " I like attending my review because it is about planning things for me and about what I want".

The service was active in involving carers in consultation. A series of consultation events had been arranged to enable foster carers to discuss how the service could improve open discussions and support for foster carers and what would support them in undertaking their role. The manager of the service said that the first meeting had been very positive and another one was planned for the week after the inspection. Carers visited confirmed that they had been invited to attend the consultation meetings and although not all carers had chosen to go those that had said that they felt very positive about them.

The service also held support groups throughout the borough and although these had not been held during the school holiday period a list of dates for future meetings had been made available to the carers.

The family and friends family placement staff within the family placement team had developed and improved consultation with family and friend carers although they did not have a specific meetings arranged.

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)

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

14 & 29

The quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

The aftercare service had developed to provide a continuity of care for the young people placed with the fostering service.

Information about foster carers allowances were provided in written form to all carers.

EVIDENCE:

The service had developed links with the after care team to improve the support provided to young people preparing for independence. Support workers and family placement workers wherever possible, were visiting the young people and foster carers with the aftercare workers to provide a continuity of care. Foster carers reported that they had previously felt that the aftercare team did not support them. To address this the after care team had developed an information pack for both the young person and the carer. Some carers spoken to felt that the service that they received from the after care team was appropriate although a number of carers stated that this service was inconsistent and did not respond to the needs of the young person in placement.

Carers confirmed that payments were received on time and that they were aware of the process to follow for any additional allowances.

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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 21, 24 & 32

The quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using the available evidence including a visit to the service.

The fostering service is effectively managed; with clear lines of accountability with a team of family placement staff who are trained and who receive the level of supervision and developmental support they require to ensure positive outcomes for the children and young people placed.

Children and young peoples' files did not contain all information required to support why decisions had been made for the individual child/young person.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service was fully staffed to fulfil the aims and the objectives of the fostering service. The development of the team to provide additional support to family and friend carers had been in place for a number of months and was making a positive impact in ensuring that assessments and reviews of carers were being undertaken and links were being developed with carers.

The service had procedures in place for the recruitment of foster carers and had received a hundred applications over the past twelve months. Eleven recruited carers had been approved. Recruitment was planned to specifically target potential carers from Black and Ethnic minorities and a draft recruitment campaign was awaiting approval.

The service had a training and development plan for foster carers. This had been further developed over the past twelve months. One of the senior family placement social workers and a training officer for the authority had developed the training programme to meet the needs of the carers. There was also evidence of increased National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level III training for carers being undertaken. Carers spoken to felt that training was discussed and offered on a regular basis, however, some carers had not undertaken any training for a number of years. The manager of the service said that this was being addressed through supervision of carers and their annual reviews.

The files of approved carers were inspected and found to contain evidence that the manager routinely monitored the files. Where it had been identified that there were missing documentation the manager had recorded the date of the review of the file. The family placement workers identified the missing documentation and recorded on the file content sheet when this was obtained and placed on the file.

The children and families teams in the area offices maintained children and young peoples' files. Files did not contain all information required and although there was evidence that the files were being audited, missing information had not been put into place. It was difficult in some cases to establish why the young person had come into care and when workers had changed this was not apparent to the new workers. At the front of each file there is a form that should detail all significant events. However, these had not been completed on some of the files examined. It is important that a clear chronology of significant events is maintained to support why decisions have been made with regards the care of the young person.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	2

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

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	3

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS30	24(3)©	The service must ensure that the Panel composition includes a currently serving Elected Member of the local authority.	30/11/06
2	FS24	22	Wigan Children and Families service must ensure that they keep comprehensive records on all young people placed.	30/01/07

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	FS7	The service should continue to recruit carers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds and carers specifically for teenagers.
2	FS11	The service should continue to develop upon the consultations being held with carers and young people so that they are able to influence the way in which the service is run.
3	FS14	The service should ensure that all young people have allocated aftercare workers in place and have Pathway Plans completed in consultation with young people and

		their carers.
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