



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Redcar & Cleveland Fostering

**Grosmont Resource Centre
20 Grosmont Close
Redcar
TS10 4PJ**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Smith

Announced Inspection
31st October 2005 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	Redcar & Cleveland Fostering
Address	Grosmont Resource Centre 20 Grosmont Close Redcar TS10 4PJ
Telephone number	01642 495910
Fax number	01642 491630
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Judith Allan
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Fostering Service is based at Grosmont Resource Centre in Redcar. The service currently provides support to approximately 130 children in foster placements with around 70 foster carers. The service provides and supports long and short term placements as well as shared care, family support and specialist placements and those where children are fostered by family or friends. The fostering service staff team comprises the manager and six supervising social workers and a team clerk. In addition three foster carer support workers are employed to provide extra support to foster carers.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, carers and staff at Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service for their warm welcome and the way they worked hard to help the inspectors do their job and find out what the fostering service is like. All people spoken to were very helpful and many people spent time completing questionnaires and sending them to the inspectors before the visit to the service. Information and evidence in this report was gathered from questionnaires sent to foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers before the inspection and from written information supplied by the manager. Questionnaires were returned from 11 foster children and 18 foster carers and 62 questionnaires were returned from placing social workers, many of whom had completed several questionnaires because they had a number of children placed with different foster carers. The inspectors wish to express their particular gratitude to these social workers who made the time to return this information, it was very valuable. All this information was used when this report was compiled.

A team of two inspectors spent four days with the fostering team and gathered information by:

- Talking individually with children, carers and staff
- Visiting foster carers homes
- Group discussion with carers
- Group discussion with staff
- Interviews with children's social workers
- Reading children's, carers and staff files
- Reading records
- Sending and analysing questionnaires set out above
- Observing the fostering panel and reading records of its meetings.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is very good at finding children foster parents who are very good at looking after them and at helping them and their foster parents live together. Children's social workers said that nearly all foster carers are meeting children's needs very well indeed. Children said things like, "You feel safe and loved, like you have a family that care" and "You get looked after better, you get fed properly, safety, loved." Another said, "If you have a problem you know that your social worker will sort it out."

The fostering service and foster carers are good at helping children get a good education and are good at keeping children healthy and well. One child said, "My foster carers support me on how to look after myself." They are also good

at helping children keep in touch with their own families and at asking children what they want to do and what they think about the help they get and their foster parents. Foster children are helped to do lots of things that they enjoy, one said, "I have got to do a lot of stuff which I wouldn't have done anywhere else."

Foster parents usually get good information about the children who go to live with them and this means that they can look after them better.

The staff in the fostering service are very good at supporting foster parents to help them look after children properly and foster parents also get very good training to help them to do their work. One foster carer said " My congratulations to all our staff in their endeavours (hard work) to help and assist both children and foster carers." Another said that the best thing about the fostering service is, "All the staff. Each and every one of them are helpful, polite and know how to do their job to the maximum." Fostering staff visit foster parents a lot to check that things are all right with them and the foster children.

The fostering service is good at working with people who want to foster to make sure that they are the right sort of people. New foster carers get checked out very carefully and get a lot of training before they can foster. New foster carers cannot foster until a group of experts called a panel make a recommendation that they are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly. This panel is very careful, gets a lot of information and thinks very hard about people before it recommends that they can foster. This is good for children as it helps keep them safe and have a good life.

The inspectors think that it is the very good support and training that foster carers get, a lot of hard work between foster carers, social workers and fostering staff and the good checking of foster carers that helps foster carers to provide so much good care to children.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection a new manager has started work at the fostering service. This manager has done a good job of taking over running the service and has worked hard to keep making the foster service better.

The manager has made a system for checking that the fostering service is running properly and keeping the right information about things.

Some more work has been done to the handbook that foster carers get to help them know how to do their job.

The way that panel finds out things that have happened at the panel that decides about permanent placements for children that might change things for

foster carers has got better. This means that panel can make better decisions about deciding whether foster carers are suitable or matching children with foster carers.

The manager and staff have worked hard to get support and training for foster carers even better.

These things mean, that from the information the inspectors found at this inspection, children are getting better foster care now than they were in the past.

What they could do better:

The people that run the fostering service need to get better at checking new staff members and at how they keep information about staff members so that they can make sure that the staff are the right sort of people to work with children. They also need to make sure that Criminal Records Bureau checks on staff are done every three years as the fostering standards say.

The fostering service needs to make sure that all foster parents have safe caring rules for their home that tell them and fostered children how they should be looked after safely.

Most children told inspectors that they know how to complain to the fostering service or their social worker but most did not know that they could complain to an inspector if they needed to. The fostering service should do some work to make sure that children know this.

Foster carers get good training but have not had training in dealing with bullying; the fostering standards say they should get this training and some foster carers said it would help them. Foster carers should get this training.

Some foster parents and children said that children could not sleep over at friends' houses. They said that all their friend's family would need to be checked out to make sure they were the right sort of people to have a foster child to stay and that this takes a very long time. The government has rules to say people need to work out whether it is safe for a foster child to sleep at friends but that these checks are not all necessary. The fostering service should make sure that it does the right things so that children get the same chances to visit friends as children who are not fostered.

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 outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12

Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service works well with foster carers to ensure that children's health needs are met and their health and development is promoted.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carer's files examined contained useful information about their foster child's health needs in the foster placement agreement and the carers visited during the inspection showed that they know the health needs of their foster children well. Foster carer agreements require foster carers to meet children's health needs and a range of training is provided in relation to children's physical, emotional and mental health.

A number of examples of foster carers seeking out additional health support for children were noted during the inspection; foster carers had sought the input of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and others had taken a lead in getting health assessment or treatment for the young person placed with them. Foster carers' recording contained information about the children's health and any treatment received and placement agreements set out the arrangements to be made to meet children's health needs and any consent issues arising from this. Foster carers spoken to said that in the great majority of cases they receive sufficient information about a child at the time a placement is made and that problems in this situation are isolated incidents only. This view was confirmed by responses in questionnaires returned from social workers. 78% of carers who responded said that they get enough information, only 11% said that they do not get enough information with some of these people commenting "Often the information is not known" or "They can only tell you what they know". The remainder of people said that they are sometimes get sufficient information.

Where matching reports had been carried out for long term foster placements the health and medical information in these was appropriately detailed and comprehensive. Observation of panel during a discussion considering then application of prospective foster carers showed that applicant's ability to work with children's health needs was considered and this was confirmed from panel minutes.

Records in children's files showed that Looked After Children (LAC) medical checks take place annually as required.

Young people spoken to who were able to express an opinion said that their health needs are met. One said, "I go to a new doctor near where I live now." Others stated in the questionnaires they returned, "My foster carers support me to look after myself" and "I eat lots of fruit and vegetables and I go to the doctors when I need to get checked."

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30

Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service provides competent, well trained and well supported foster carers who meet children's needs very well and ensure that they are kept safe. The service is very thorough in its assessment and approval process to ensure that foster carers are suitable to work with children. The fostering panel is effective and makes good quality decisions about the approval of foster carers to promote and safeguard children's welfare. The organisation's recruitment procedure is not robust enough to adequately check on the background and suitability of the service's staff members.

EVIDENCE:

At the time of the inspection only one person had commenced employment with the fostering service since the last inspection in February 2005. The recruitment file of this person was examined. The file contained an application form that showed that the applicant had named two referees but there was no record to show that these references had been taken up. There was no proof of the applicant's social work qualification on the file and the person's employment history only contained the years that some previous posts were started and left, not the months; it was therefore not possible to be certain that there were no gaps in the person's employment history.

The file also did not contain a recent photograph of the person. Additionally, the person had taken up post with a Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure undertaken in a previous post over 18 months prior to her starting work in the fostering service and the evidence that this check had been undertaken did not specify that it had been undertaken in relation to working with children. It was noted also, that evidence of other Criminal Records Bureau checks did not specify this either. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council must ensure that the recruitment process meets the requirements of Regulations 7 and 20 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and that records held contain the information set out in Schedule 1 of these regulations.

During the inspection it was also noted that the Criminal Records Bureau checks of two of the fostering service's staff had been undertaken over three years ago. It is recommended that all Criminal Records Bureau checks are renewed every three years.

Case tracking visits to foster carers showed that those visited provide a safe and nurturing environment. Children spoken to on these visits spoke very highly of their foster carers. One said, "I've got a lovely home and lovely foster parents, I don't want to move from here ever." A young person stated in the questionnaire he returned, "I have got to do stuff which I wouldn't have done anywhere else." Two thirds of children who answered the question about complaints said that they know how to make a complaint about the service, though only a third said that they know how to complaint to an inspector. It is recommended that the fostering service ensure that young people know how to complain to an inspector if they do not feel able to complain to the fostering service or their social worker.

The assessment and approval process for foster carers is thorough with commendably detailed 'Form F' (foster carer assessment) reports being completed. It was noted that panel commented on the detail and thoroughness of an assessment presented to them during the inspector's observation of the meeting and examination of files provided additional confirmation of this. This assessment includes a comprehensive assessment of the foster carers and their home including an assessment of their caring ability and the physical safety of the home. These assessments are updated annually at foster carers' reviews and are monitored by supervision visits by staff to foster carers' homes. All foster carers visited made the inspectors welcome in their homes and were open and honest in expressing their views.

Detailed matching reports were in place in situations where young people were being matched with long term foster carers and these contained evidence of the thorough work undertaken to ensure that suitable foster carers are found to meet the needs of young people. Foster carers, fostering service staff and placing social workers agreed that matching for long term placements is very good but said that, with regard to mainstream foster carers, the demand for placements is such that matching is not always possible as sufficient carers are not always available. One carer said, "They try to match but sometimes its you or no-one else." Another said, "It can be an emergency and then children just have to go where there is a space." All foster carers consulted during the inspection commented very highly about the level of support offered to foster carers by the fostering team and it was evident that carers receive good levels of useful training. Foster carers also said that they generally get good information about the children they take and that information is made available to them as soon as it is known. The inspectors consider that these strengths contribute to social worker's high level of satisfaction with the suitability of the foster placement their young person is living in. In response to the question, "How well do you think the foster carer is looking after this child?" 83% stated "Very well indeed." And a further 15% said "Quite Well". No social worker expressed the view that the carer was not looking after the child well. This level of satisfaction with the quality of foster placements is commendable and worthy of note.

Foster carers receive clear guidance in their preparation training and in the 'Fostering A-Z' (foster carer handbook) about protecting children. This includes information about managing children's behaviour, permitted and prohibited sanctions and working with children who may have been abused. Foster carer training also includes work on child protection and it is commendable to note that specific training is offered based on the needs of the type of children carers work with. Health and safety checklists of foster carers' homes are undertaken during the assessment process and are updated annually at foster carer reviews. Foster carers are required to produce safe caring policies for their own homes and families. Copies of these were in place in two of the four foster carer's files examined and information was in place in the other two files to show that such a policy was being developed. The service should make sure that any outstanding safe caring policies are completed as soon as possible.

It was noted that foster carers have not been provided in training in identifying, preventing and responding to bullying and it is recommended that this is provided.

Observation of minutes of the fostering panel and attendance at a panel meeting at which the approval of prospective foster carers was considered showed that panel is thorough and robust in its consideration of prospective foster carers. An in depth consideration of the merits of the application was considered and insightful questions and comments raised. The panel chair ensured that the discussions were well structured and panel's recommendation to the agency decision maker was very clear and specific. The make up of panel meets the requirements of Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and contains people with appropriate expertise.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7, 13 and 31

The fostering service works with foster carers to provide children with positive educational and leisure opportunities and ensures that diversity and equality is promoted. Respite and support carers are supported to work effectively with the children's parents.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service works hard to provide carers with the appropriate skills and values to recognise the individual needs of children. Discrimination in all forms is challenged in foster carer preparation training and ongoing training is provided in anti-discriminatory practice. Work takes place to encourage awareness of different cultures and groups, supervising social workers provided evidence of specific initiatives for children and foster carers to celebrate and learn to understand other cultures.

The assessment process for prospective foster carers includes work with regard to the applicants' values and a consideration of their background and how this might influence their ability to provide non-judgemental foster care. Training is provided in relation to children's special needs or disabilities and foster carers spoken to said that equipment and resources are provided where necessary. Although one foster carer commented that training with regard to disability is a bit too basic, this appears to be an isolated view as other people cited positive experiences of training. The provision, by the fostering service, of support carers to work with young people and their families by providing respite and support with problems with the aim of keeping children living with their families is a positive innovation.

Visits to foster carers and examination of their files and those of the children they care for demonstrated some very effective work to encourage and support young people with their education. Foster carers had advocated strongly on behalf of a young person and secured them a place in a more appropriate school; appointments had been arranged with educational specialists to ensure that children's needs were met properly. Files and discussion showed that foster carers had developed good relationships with school and were taking a keen interest in encouraging education. A young person said, "They (foster carers) contact school every day make sure things have been all right for me." Others commented in questionnaires about the help they get with their schooling. One said, "They (foster carers) help me with my homework when I get stuck."

Foster carer agreements set out the requirements of foster carers to promote educational achievement and arrangements for doing this are set out in the placement agreement and include identification of who is to be responsible for costs incurred. Three young people's files examined did not contain up-to date LAC documentation in respect of the young person's education. Personal Education Plans (PEP) were well out of date for two young people and one young person with special educational needs did not have a Statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) on his file. In this instance the foster carers had a copy of the SEN themselves and were attending a review of the statement the day after they spoke to the inspector. These files are the responsibility of the placing social work teams and not the fostering service, however it is important that this information is in place to enable children's education to be promoted as effectively as possible.

Clear arrangements are in place to ensure that parents remain the primary carers and decision makers in situations where children are receiving short term and respite care and for those provided services from support carers.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10 and 11

The fostering service is good at promoting and supporting contact between children and their families but could promote young people's ability to visit and stay with friends more effectively. The fostering service is good at consulting with young people, their families and with foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

The importance of promoting appropriate contact between young people and their families is set out in the foster care agreement and stressed in the Fostering A-Z. All foster carers spoken to during the inspection told inspectors about the actions they take to support contact and the support they receive from the fostering team and children's social workers. Foster placement agreements contain information about the arrangements and responsibilities for contact. With regard to how foster parents work with children's families, questionnaires were returned from social workers in respect of 49 children. Of these 67% said the foster carer worked with the child's family "Very well" and 25% rated this as "Fairly Well". 6% of questionnaires rated the work as "Average" with only 2% rating it as "A little disappointing." No questionnaire rated the quality of the foster carer's work with the child's family as having a "Poor record."

Two of the children's questionnaires returned stated the worst thing about fostering was that they were never able to stay overnight at friends house; this view was echoed by foster carers in the group meeting held with them. Two carers said this was a problem because checks, including Criminal Records Bureau disclosures, had to be carried out on the families of friends at which young people might want to stay. One said that she doesn't even try to get consent for overnight stays as the process takes so long the event has passed before the checks can be carried out. She said, "I just say he can't go and invite them to come and stay with us."

This issue was discussed with the fostering service manager and her line manager in the light of government guidance that Criminal Records Bureau disclosures are no longer necessary in this situation as long as appropriately thorough risk assessments are carried out. It was evident from this discussion that the service is aware of this guidance and the service acknowledged that work should be done to make sure that all relevant parties have revised guidance. It is important that this should happen to ensure that young people are not marginalised and have the ability to make and develop friendships as other children.

Children interviewed as part of the inspection process told the inspectors of things that they had been asked about and about the choices they have in their lives. Over two thirds of children who returned questionnaires said that their foster carers consult them about their care and the things that they do and over half said that they had been asked their opinions about their foster carers. Records of information gained for foster carers' reviews contained evidence of children being consulted about their carers as part of the review process. One young person commented in a questionnaire that "I don't think that social services listen to foster children enough" but this was an isolated comment with the majority of children commenting that they are asked about school, activities, clothes and friends. One young person said, "I can have my say about anything at my review or to my social worker and they try to do what I want." Nine out of ten young people who answered the question in the questionnaire said that they see their social worker alone with eight of these children stating that this happens regularly.

Foster carers also commented positively on the fact that they are consulted about their views for the care of children. All sixteen foster carers who answered the question in the questionnaire said that they are consulted about the care of their foster children and listened to. Foster carers told the inspectors in a group meeting that they are treated as much more professional people now and are more fully part of the team of people working with the child. Although some cited some instances in which children's social workers did not give them sufficient regard all agreed that this is rare now. One foster carer cited an example, which was confirmed by the child's social worker, of a difference of opinion about a young people that resulted in the foster carer's view being actioned.

All parties consulted commented positively about the effectiveness of the working arrangements between foster carers, children's social workers and supervising social workers saying that information is communicated very well.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 29

The fostering service has an effective and appropriate system for making foster carer payments that enable carers to meet children's needs well.

EVIDENCE:

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Fostering Service has a structured policy in place regarding fostering allowance that is structured into banding levels based on foster carers' assessed competencies. This policy allows foster carers' progress, experience and development to be rewarded. In addition the fostering service provides specialist, single placement carers to care for those children with more complex needs or who need more intensive work. These carers receive an enhanced allowance at a flat rate for taking part in this scheme and were specifically recruited to undertake this work. None of the foster carers with whom the inspectors had contact raised concerns about the level of allowances. Clear information is provided in the foster carer agreement about foster carer payments. One foster carer described how the banding level is considered at foster carers' review based on an agreed assessment of their competence. She told the inspectors that, in one instance where her review was delayed the increase in allowance was backdated to the point at which her review should have occurred. Other carers visited told the inspectors that they can claim expenses for additional costs of supporting the child.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

As above. We looked at outcomes for standard(s) 17, 21, 22, 23 and 24

Children receive care from well supervised foster carers who are very well trained and receive a high level of support from the fostering team. Although record keeping is good some children's records need to be more up-to-date.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service comprises the manager, six supervising social workers, three foster carer support workers and a team clerk though at the time of the inspection one of the social workers was on secondment to another team and a support worker was filling her post. This support worker did not have a social work qualification but was not carrying out assessments or undertaking foster carers supervision or reviews. All staff undertaking 'Form F' assessments and approval reports and those supervising and contributing to the foster carer review process are qualified social workers and have undertaken on going training. Foster carers consulted said that the fostering service is busy and most said that the team would benefit from more staff. When asked about the work undertaken by the team, however, they were all extremely positive and complimentary and none cited instances in which the service had been compromised by a lack of staff. One commented in a questionnaire that, "There are people who can be contacted 24 hours per day for support and advice."

The quality of recent foster care assessments and approval reports is very good; the agency's fostering panel commended a supervising social worker on the quality of her approval report whilst the inspector was present and examination of foster carers' files confirmed this fact. One foster carer said about the assessment process, "It was very heavy but OK. We got a lot of support all the way through and, although it challenged us the assessment and training helped us a lot. They (fostering service) were open and honest all the way through. (Supervising social worker name) was brilliant, amazing."

All foster carers visited as part of the inspection process and all those who attended the meeting with inspectors said that they receive very good support from the fostering service. Of the seventeen foster carers who commented about support in their questionnaires 76% said they were very satisfied with the support they receive and the remaining 24% said that they feel quite well supported. None said that they "Don't get enough support." In interviews and questionnaires foster carers cited the high level of support received from the fostering team. One carer told inspectors how the supervising social worker visited her home every morning to make breakfast for her foster children on an occasion when she was poorly. Other comments about support for foster carers included, "Always excellent support throughout my seven years as a carer with my problems and the children's", "Our link worker is very supportive", "The fostering team are very down to earth and supportive."

All parties spoken to reported good communication between foster carers, supervising social workers and the children's social workers. Although some carers said that support from children's social workers was not always as good as it could be they recognised the pressures faced by these professionals and said that difficulties are much less frequent than in the past and now tend to be isolated incidents. One foster carer reported difficulties in getting support for them and their foster child from the child's social worker whilst the person was off work but said that this was resolved when the person came back to work.

Interviews with foster carers and supervising social workers and examination of foster carers' files showed that an effective supervision system is in place for foster carers. It is evident that regular visits take place to foster carers including unannounced visits. Foster care agreements set out the expectation that foster carers undertake training and receive supervision and also makes sure that foster carers understand the support and services they are entitled to from the fostering team. All carers spoken to said that they had received the service's Fostering A-Z and said that it is very comprehensive, useful and accessible. One said, "The A-Z guide to fostering has been very helpful." Foster carers consulted said that they know how to make a complaint about the fostering service and all spoken to said that they are very confident that the service will address any concerns that they have.

Foster carers receive very good levels of training covering a range of topics appropriate to their role. It is noteworthy that training is arranged based on the needs of individuals or specific groups of carers; training in child protection relating to work with children aged 0 to 5 is provided, for example, for carers working with younger children. The foster care agreement sets out the service's expectation that all foster carers will undertake training including the completion of NVQ level 3 in child care. Commendably, 25 carers already possess this qualification and the inspectors were informed that another 8 carers are currently undertaking the training with others ready to enrol. Training needs are considered in foster carer supervision and at their annual reviews. The manager said that the appointment of foster carer support workers has encouraged the take up and effectiveness of training. One foster carer said in the group meeting that she had fostered for a long time and always felt that she did not need training but that one of the support workers had "gone on at her" about training so she went on a course and now goes to as many as she can and really benefits from training. Two prospective foster carers who are currently undertaking the fostering preparation training attended the meeting with inspectors and said that the training is very thorough and useful. The service keeps a central record of all training undertaken and monitors this as well as evaluating the training's effectiveness.

Children's social worker files examined did not all contain full, up-to-date LAC documentation in respect of the child concerned. Two young people's files examined contained out of date Placement Plan Part 1 and 2 documents despite the correct document being retained on the foster carer's file. In another situation the child's file did not contain a copy of his Statement of Special Educational Need despite the foster carers having a copy of this document. As the fostering service is provided by a local authority, the children's files examined were the responsibility of their social workers and not the fostering team. It is important however that these files contain full, accurate and up-to-date information to ensure that the nature and quality of care provided is recorded and supported. Children's files did, however, contain records of all contact between the child and the social worker and most contained a useful chronology of events and core assessment of the child. Files contained evidence that regular supervision takes place.

Foster carers told inspectors that they generally get sufficient written information about the child at the point of admission and all acknowledged that in some situations information is not available.

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	1
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	1
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	2
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
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	4
22	3
23	4
24	2
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? NO

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	FS3FS15	7, 20	Staff recruitment records must contain all the information set out in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 in order to ensure that the recruitment process is sufficiently thorough.	13/01/06
2	FS3FS15	7, 20	Evidence that Criminal Records Bureau checks have taken place must specify whether they were undertaken in relation to working with children or adults.	13/01/06

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	FS3FS15	Telephone enquiries should be made to follow up written employment references received for staff.
2	FS3FS15	Criminal Records Bureau disclosures should be renewed every three years.
3	FS9	The service should make sure that any outstanding foster carer safe caring policies are completed as soon as possible.

4	FS9	It is recommended that the fostering service ensure that young people know how to complain to an inspector if they do not feel able to complain to the fostering service or their social worker.
5	FS9	Foster carers should be provided with training in bullying.
6	FS13FS24	Children's social work files should contain full and up-to-date LAC documentation.
7	FS10	The fostering service should make sure that all parties are aware of current guidance regarding fostered children having overnight stays at the houses of friends.

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