



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Slough Borough Council Fostering Services

**Town Hall
Bath Road
Slough
Berkshire
SL1 3UQ**

Lead Inspector
Maire Atherton

Announced Inspection
21st November & 4th –7th December 2006 10:00

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Slough Borough Council Fostering Services
Address	Town Hall Bath Road Slough Berkshire SL1 3UQ
Telephone number	01753 690400
Fax number	01753 875242
Email address	tracey.tilling@slough.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Slough Borough Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Lesley Fitzgerald
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 12th December 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Slough Borough Council Fostering Service provides a family placement service to meet the needs of Slough children and young people who are looked after by the authority on a short term/temporary or longer term/permanent basis. The service also supports children who continue to live within their family of origin by providing regular periods of family based care. (relief care or respite care for children and young people with disabilities via Home from Home scheme).

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

The team is located in the centre of Slough with other local authority children's services and its work is divided into two main areas - short term fostering/relief/respite care and permanency via long term fostering /adoption each area having its own staff and manager.

SUMMARY

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

Before the inspection questionnaires were sent to all the children fostered who were over 7 years old, their parents, all foster carers registered and the placing social workers. 3 (12%) completed questionnaires were received from children, 2 were returned blank; 3 from parents (10%); 12 foster carers (30%) and 8 placing officers (31%) returned questionnaires. The manager of the service also returned the pre-inspection information requested.

The fostering service inspector went to:

- A foster carers support group
- A foster carers coffee morning
- A fostering team meeting.

The inspector met with:

- Two foster carers and the children placed with them in their homes.
- The link workers and placing social workers of the children case tracked.
- The Children's Fund and Participation team manager.
- The day-to-day managers of the service.
- The manager of the education stream of the Pathways team.
- The independent Chair of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.
- The Wellbeing worker in the Pathways team.
- The Looked after Children nurse.
- Two Psychologists from the Psychology Service.

The inspector had telephone conversations with:

- A foster carer living some distance away from Slough.
- The panel chair.
- A young person who requested this through the questionnaire.

A sample of records was also inspected.

What the service does well:

The fostering service is clearly centred on the needs of the children. There is strong management of the service with good links with other professionals, especially health and education.

Foster carers are well supported through visits, training and groups to make sure that they have what they need to care for children.

There are lots of creative ways in which children's views are asked for. There is evidence that things happen as a result of what they say and they are kept informed of this.

What has improved since the last inspection?

There have been more foster carers recruited since the last inspection from a variety of backgrounds.

Some young people have been trained in interviewing staff and it is planned that they will be involved in the next staff appointment.

What they could do better:

Some core training for foster carers after approval should take place within a specific time.

Some records need to be changed to meet the regulations.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

There are good links between the fostering service and healthcare professionals to ensure that health, development and wellbeing of children and young people is positively promoted by foster carers.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service

EVIDENCE:

In the course of the inspection the inspector met with a range of healthcare professionals who have an input into the promotion of health and wellbeing of the young people placed with foster carers. All spoke of good links with the fostering service. There were good examples seen of proactive work to support foster carers in promoting the health of children. In one case a clinical psychologist visited a foster carers' home to discuss strategies to manage the behaviour of a child. These strategies had been implemented and had effected change in the child's behaviour.

The children case tracked had healthcare plans in place, which had been written by the Looked after Children nurse, as part of the wider Berkshire East Looked after Children Health team. Foster carers were involved in the healthcare plan meeting. There was generally good monitoring of these plans through the statutory review system. In one case tracked additional counselling services recommended in the health plan had not been followed up. This case had been identified for transfer between social work teams. The process had been significantly delayed and had resulted in a number of actions not being implemented in a timely manner. This had been identified and was being addressed at the time of this visit. In one case tracked the foster carers had to perform an invasive medical procedure. Written confirmation from the

relevant healthcare professional should be obtained that the foster carer has been trained and is competent to undertake this task. The inspector was informed that work in relation to invasive medical procedures has begun for residential services.

Foster carers spoken with said that they had been provided with up to date health information on placement or shortly afterwards, as well as parental consent for medical treatment. The cases tracked showed that children had attended routine healthcare appointments. One child spoken with confirmed this. Two of the three young people who responded to the questionnaire said that they always got support and advice about being healthy. The third said "Sometimes" got this. The examples given were "Stop smoking, healthy diet and exercise".

71% of foster carers responses in questionnaires were that the fostering service was good or excellent at providing support to help them in promoting the health of children placed with them. Examples included "good information is available about diets, sports etc" and "encourages healthy lifestyles". One expressed some frustration that transfers between orthodontists can result in delay in treatment for Looked after Children. This is outside the influence of the fostering service.

Healthcare professionals spoken with outlined their planned involvement in the foster carers training programme as well as providing a direct link with foster carers for advice/support. This could be through a telephone line and a drop in session alongside the foster carers coffee mornings once per month. The psychologists spoken with outlined the intention of providing parenting programmes for foster carers to support the management of difficult behaviour. There is also consideration being given to the involvement of a clinical psychologist and a wellbeing worker in the assessment process of children likely to move out of the local authority area to identify the child's support needs to ensure that these needs can be met in the area the child is moving to.

A new health fax has been developed for children and young people to provide them with their own record of appointments, treatment and immunisations etc. The fax contains local telephone numbers for the Looked after Children nurse, other healthcare professionals as well as advice lines. The Looked after Children nurse told the inspector that the launch is to be planned so as to publicise the fax and the information it contains. The target age range had not been specified at the time of this visit.

In the pre-inspection information the manager said that the training for foster carers included health, hygiene, first aid, drugs and alcohol. This training needs to be provided more regularly to ensure that foster carers can access this in a timely way after approval.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

There is training and guidance for staff and foster carers that underpins the policies and procedures in place to keep children and young people safe.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The Commission does not register Local Authority fostering services. There has been no change in the management of the fostering service since the last inspection.

The foster homes visited during the course of the inspection provided the children with comfortable, warm and well-decorated accommodation. The homes of foster carers are inspected as part of the annual review process. A health and safety assessment forms part of the review and was seen on the foster carer files inspected. Supervising social workers should be provided with clear guidance on the positioning of beds/cots near radiators and the suitability of beds to ensure that the safety of children is not compromised.

There was clear evidence on the foster carers files that the fostering service is robust in ensuring that transport provided by foster carers is safe and appropriate to the child's needs. Supervising social workers see the relevant documents and have kept foster carers informed about the latest guidance about appropriate restraints for transporting children.

In the pre-inspection information supplied the manager stated "In matching short-term and emergency placements we consider a range of issues including the plan for the child, the individual needs of the child, the skills and experience of the carers, the locality and the risk factors." There was evidence seen of full information sharing. One placing social worker and one foster carer said "good matching" was what the service did best to help achieve good outcomes for children.

The local authority does not have a separate foster placement agreement and relies on the Looked after Children documentation to fulfil the requirement. As noted in previous inspection reports this does not provide all the information outlined in the standards and regulations. The local authority is planning to introduce new documentation in January 2007. It should be confirmed that this contains specific reference to the elements of matching which were taken into consideration when agreeing the placement and identify any areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match.

In both cases tracked the children placed were with foster carers of a different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This had been acknowledged explicitly in the documentation on file and the plans to compensate for the gaps had been well identified in one case, where this was the expressed wish of the child. The children in both cases were seen to be very comfortable and at ease with their carers. This child had also had the opportunity to visit the foster carers before moving in. The other children had been placed with the foster carers in an emergency.

At the time of this visit there were three children placed long-term and the adoption and permanency team support these foster carers. The manager outlined the very clear process for matching a long-term placement. This process is also used when matching a child to long-term foster carers with an independent agency. The inspector was told about two cases where foster carers with independent fostering services who had had Slough children placed on an emergency basis were hoping to be registered as long term carers for Slough. It is hoped that as the pool of foster carers is increased there will be increased opportunity for long term matches in-house. The permanency manager told the inspector that once a child is referred for family finding for permanency the case is reviewed monthly through permanency tracking meetings. There is also a Looked after Children panel that has a responsibility for flagging up concerns about the possibility of drift.

In the pre-inspection information the manager said "Regular training is provided for all carers, the subjects covered include child protection training, managing disclosures, managing behaviour that challenges and safe caring. Carers have safer care training so are aware of expectations and in turn this means poor care practices would be easier to challenge." The training records showed that there could be some considerable delay in foster carers attending this training following approval, due to oversubscribed courses. Where foster carers have attended training prior to approval the evidence of the courses should be available on their files.

A Children's Trust Board had been established in Slough. One of its tasks is to raise public awareness of the need to safeguard and protect all children and young people. The Local Children's Safeguarding Board was established in July 2006, under an independent Chair. One focus of this group is the welfare of the most vulnerable children and young people. The inspector was informed that there are some sub groups, shared functions and membership between these boards. The independent chair demonstrated a thorough and robust understanding of the role and outlined a range of development plans, including the management of allegations.

Pan Berkshire child protection procedures were launched on 1st October 2006. The new procedures have been issued following the publication of new national guidance from the Central Government in "Working Together to Safeguard Children, April 2006". The inspector attended a briefing for foster carers on this. Foster carers contributed well to the discussion and demonstrated a good understanding of the issues.

All carers sign a Foster Care Agreement which states that corporal punishment is not acceptable. The manager has identified additional training for all carers and social workers in de-escalation techniques and self-harm and suicide to further equip carers in caring for children.

The foster carers who responded to the questionnaires on information received about a child prior to placement were 70% excellent or good and 30% adequate or poor. Foster carers receiving emergency placements had least information according to the questionnaires and foster carers understood the reasons for this. Once the child was in placement some foster carers reported having to "chase information and paperwork" and this was evidenced in one case tracked.

The data supplied by the manager as part of the pre-inspection information stated that there had been no child protection allegations in the past year.

Safe care, anti-bullying policies and unauthorised absence policies are in place and given to all carers.

Four staff records were inspected these were agency and sessional staff files as well as permanent staff files. The agency staff file contained all the required information, including a recent criminal records bureau check. There were some gaps in the other records seen. The recruitment records for sessional staff need to contain all the information outlined in schedule 1. This includes a photograph, full details of previous employment including dates and two written references. In one permanent staff file both references were supplied by the same agency covering the same period. There was no evidence that references had been sought from other employers. In another file there was no written evidence that a gap in employment had been explored with the applicant. There was evidence that telephone calls had been made to verify references and copies of professional qualifications were on file.

The professional staff working for the fostering service confirmed that they were appropriately qualified.

The panel was not observed on this inspection. The inspector had a telephone conversation with the panel chair. The independent chair has held the position for a year. The panel chair outlined the efforts made to have the panel composition reflect the ethnicity of the community as well as maintain a gender split and specialist knowledge. This remains on the agenda for the quarterly business panel meetings. There are specialist health and education panel members.

The panel chair expressed the view that the assessments presented to panel were of a good standard. Individual panel members may go direct to managers with comments about individual reports. Foster carers are invited to attend panel. Foster carers who attended panel had found it a useful experience.

The majority of foster carers annual reviews have been back to panel in the last year. The annual report provides the panel with management information about foster carers annual reviews.

The panel chair commented favourably on the increasing numbers of foster carers being presented to panel providing greater range and type of foster carers. This has been maintained since the last inspection and is ongoing. The panel undertakes a wide range of tasks, including best interests and matching for permanence and placements made under Regulation 38. There is a separate panel for family and friends carers, chaired by the same person. There may be some confusion between the panel roles when children move from Regulation 38 placements (under the fostering regulations) to Special Guardianship or Residence orders. The timescale of six weeks for completion of assessments under the Regulation 38 is difficult to achieve. There is a policy in place that covers this area. The panel chair informed the inspector that Regulation 38 placements may be extended whilst assessments being undertaken and a plan is being developed. These cases are taken back to panel every month for monitoring purposes.

When children are placed outside the foster carers terms of approval the panel chair said that she is provided with clear documentation, including a risk assessment, for a request of change for approval. There is an expectation that this would come to panel if the placement were ongoing. There needs to be a formal system in place to ensure that this happens.

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.

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

The fostering service is committed to respecting and valuing difference and promoting the educational achievement of Looked after Children.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

In the pre-inspection information the manager provided considerable evidence for the ways in which the fostering service valued diversity. These included: the recruitment of foster carers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; continued links with a local community group, Islamia care; sessions on caring for Muslim and Sikh children and young people; books made available giving carers information about different faiths and caring for children with disabilities; training on promoting diversity and on issues relating to disability; recruitment of specialist carers who are able to care for children and young people with a range of disabilities; to develop another tier to the foster carers' scheme for specialist carers to look after children with the most challenging and complex needs. 100% of foster carers who responded to the questionnaire thought that the fostering service was either excellent or good at addressing issues of diversity and equality. 75% of placing social workers thought this and 25% thought it was adequate.

62.5% of foster carers thought that the fostering service was good at helping them support children in activities. 37.5% thought it was adequate. One of the difficulties highlighted was in signing up to courses that require termly commitments when the placement is short term. A number of children undertake after school activities. A parent of a child receiving home from home care said, "... provide opportunities that parents can't".

The three children who responded to the questionnaire said that they were always helped in their education. 100% of foster carers and placing social workers said in questionnaires that the fostering service was excellent or good at supporting children in achieving educationally.

The commitment of the local authority to promote and support the education of Looked after Children is commendable. The inspector met with the manager of the education branch of the Pathways team. The manager was enthusiastic and very knowledgeable about the service and the children and young people they support. The pre-inspection information provided by the fostering service outlined the ways in which education is promoted. Examples were private tuition for Year 11s in a chosen subject, support when a young person is temporarily excluded, support in schools, homework clubs, helpline for foster carers providing advice on education and extra support for those Looked after Children for whom English is an additional language. There is also an annual residential summer holiday, for which funding has been agreed for summer 2007. This funding was gained by young people applying for a grant from Government funding.

An annual Looked after Children achievement day was held which celebrates both academic and other achievements. Photographs of this day were on display in the education service as "The wall of fame".

Every looked after child has a Personal Education Plan which is regularly updated. One foster carer at some distance from Slough felt that she and the child placed had been well supported through the Personal Education Plan meeting and in visiting secondary schools.

Computers have been provided for looked after children. There is no current budget for this, one has been applied for. One young person expressed some frustration that the computer he had been given did not work very well. His foster carers had funded initial repairs.

The fostering service continues to run the "Home from Home" scheme for the placement on a respite basis of children and young people with a learning and/or physical disability. There are twenty-four carers providing day care to 18 children and overnight care to three children. This care was very much appreciated by the parent who responded to the questionnaire.

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.

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

10 and 11.

Quality in this outcome area is excellent.

There is a clear commitment to ensuring that the views of children and young people are heard and valued.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

As noted in the last inspection report the fostering service continues to promote contact appropriately. Foster carers on the new scheme were transporting children to contact, which is part of the agreement, providing the children with consistency. Foster carers spoken with said it worked well.

In one of the cases tracked there was a contact agreement in place. The adults involved had signed this, but not the child. There was also a risk assessment of the contact arrangements found on file. The child confirmed that he was well supported to keep in touch with family members and the foster carers helped him to negotiate his way through difficult times.

There was clear evidence that children and young people are supported and encouraged to attend their reviews. There is ongoing work to support children and young people in giving a written contribution through the use of Viewpoint. A pilot programme of getting the views of children for child protection conferences through the use of Viewpoint in schools has proved very

successful. It is planned to develop this for Looked after Children reviews. There was clear evidence of a robust quality assurance system for Looked after Children reviews. In one case tracked the reviewing officer flagged the lack of work on a case. This promoted some discussion and as a result working practices on the transfer of cases between teams has been changed and the follow up system for action plans has also been tightened.

All young people who answered the questionnaire said that they were always listened to. 100% of foster carers said that the fostering service was good or excellent at involving children in decisions about their day-to-day lives.

The inspector met with the Children's Fund and Participation team manager. The enthusiasm and commitment of the post holder is evident in the imaginative, wide ranging methods adopted to ensure that the children and young people are given a voice, their views are heard and their ideas implemented. These initiatives were well documented and evidenced in the town hall displays. For example this year the children and young people were asked about ideas for foster carers to get to know children placed with them, "ice breakers". Through the course fun day the emerging themes were more information for children who are fostered and children who foster. Children came up with and demonstrated ideas such as a word search, an octopus and a passport for foster carers and children, essential information from a child's perspective and a shorthand portfolio by foster carers. It is intended that some of this will provide the basis of training for carers and that children will be involved in the delivery of this training. Some young people have been trained in interviewing have been involved in staff interviews.

The pre-inspection information from the manager identified plans to facilitate children and young people providing their views and suggestions to the Corporate Parenting Panel through regular consultation with the Children's Participation officer. There are also plans to produce a quarterly newsletter with children including information, advice and feedback from the Corporate Parenting Panel. In addition the success of the fun day has led to plans to facilitate an annual "Fun day" for all children, regardless of geographical location, with information on services, consultation activities, fun activities and achievement celebrations.

The local authority has contracted with NCH to provide independent visitors and advocacy services to Looked after 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)

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

29.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

Foster carers receive their agreed allowances on time.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The new scheme pays allowances at Fostering Network recommended rates but in addition rewards the carers with a substantial fee per placement. The scheme also makes higher demands on carers in terms of training, facilities and tasks but these are clearly defined. Some foster carers chose to remain on the existing scheme as they were not in a position to or did not wish to meet the higher demands. Foster carers reported that they received their allowances on time.

Some clarification is needed on a basic clothing list so that foster carers are clear that they can claim additional expenses when a child arrives with few, if any clothes.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

The fostering service has robust management and is focussed on outcomes for the children and young people placed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose has been amended as recommended in the last inspection report. In the pre-inspection information the manager reported that the elected council members have formally approved it.

There is a clear and efficient management structure in place. The manager has relevant qualifications and is very knowledgeable about the fostering task. The separate management of the fostering service and the adoption and permanency team works well and provides a clear differentiation between short and long-term placements.

At the time of this visit there were two full time posts (one social worker and one recruitment/retention officer) and one part time post frozen until April 2007. The manager said and the team confirmed that the current workload was manageable and there was a system for allocation of work. As the service continues to grow the fostering service will need to recruit to these posts. The manager identified this in the pre-inspection information; the fostering service will need to "review team staffing levels in the light of increased activity to ensure that current performance is sustainable and further improved in the next 12 months".

The team used an established format for assessment as outlined in the statement of purpose. All assessments are read and signed by the line manager of the assessor. The assessments read as part of case tracking were of a good standard.

The manager of the fostering service oversees the monitoring of independent fostering provider placements. She receives a copy of the most recent inspection report and meets quarterly with an agency. Placing social workers and reviewing officers would refer any concerns or issues to the manager. There was some consideration being given to creating a half time placements officer and half time recruitment officer from the post currently frozen.

Staff and foster carers confirmed that training was available and there was a clear commitment to professional and skills development. As previously noted the core training requirements for foster carers and a timescale for completion of this training needs to be developed. Attendance at training is monitored through the annual review process. There are two foster carers conferences held annually.

In the pre-inspection information the manager said that areas of improvement in the last year had been in communication with fieldwork teams and improved planning with the Pathways Team (LAC fieldwork). This team are now managed by the same Group Manager as the Fostering Service. This was supported by 86% of placing social workers who reported good or excellent relationships

with supervising social workers and managers of the fostering service. The supervising social workers also told the inspector that there were good working relationships with the placing social workers.

There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support.

The recruitment scheme launched a year ago has been and continues to be successful, with 11 new short term carers approved since the last inspection and 6 more undergoing assessment. The plans for development as outlined in the pre-inspection information are "To develop the recruitment of specialist carers, to care for children with more complex needs and to recruit more long term in house carers".

81% of carers felt the support they received was either good or excellent. The examples given included regular visits from the supervising social worker, the advice line and out of hours support, respite care arrangements to maintain a placement and guidance. The fortnightly coffee mornings and bi-monthly evening training/support group was valued. 21 foster carers attended the evening event that took place during the inspection. One foster carer expressed some unhappiness with the support and after discussion decided to approach the management about this.

Information provided to foster carers comes from a range of sources, professional publications as well as in-house policies and procedures. The handbook provided to foster carers needs to contain up to date information.

Foster carers confirmed that annual reviews took place and reports of these were seen on file, including details of unannounced visits.

Case records for children were of a good standard; the information was orderly and accessible. There has been a move to electronic record keeping. This format was not accessed during this inspection. There is a clear audit system in place. On one file seen the audit was not signed or dated.

The administrative records requested during the inspection were made available. There were separate records for staff, foster carers and children. In addition there was some duplicated information about children on the foster carers' file. This should be removed.

There has been one complaint received since the last inspection. There was evidence that the complaint had been investigated and a response given to the complainant. It was not clear that the complainant was satisfied with the outcome.

A Family Assessment and Support Team has been established, incorporating what was previously the kinship care team. The aim is to support children within their own community and find alternatives to entering or remaining in

the Looked after Children system. There were examples given where this had been achieved through the assessment of family and friends with a view to applying for Special Guardianship orders or Residence Orders. This process may be started by a Regulation 38 placement as stated earlier in the report.

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	2
8	2
9	2
15	2
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
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	X
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	2
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	2
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

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.	FS12	17(3)	Written confirmation from the relevant healthcare professional should be obtained that the foster carer has been trained and is competent to undertake invasive medical procedures when necessary.	28/02/07
2.	FS12	17(1)	First aid training needs to be provided more regularly to ensure that foster carers can access this in a timely way after approval.	31/03/07
3.	FS9	17(1)	Child protection training needs to be provided more regularly to ensure that foster carers can access this in a timely way after approval.	31/03/07
4.	FS15	20(3)(d) Schedule 1	The recruitment records for staff (including sessional staff) need to contain all the information outlined in Schedule 1.	31/01/07
5.	FS30	34(1)(b)	Placements should be made within foster carers terms of approval.	31/01/07

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.	FS6	Clear guidance on the positioning of beds/cots near radiators and the suitability of beds should be made available.
2	FS8	It should be confirmed that the Placement Information record contains specific reference to the elements of matching which were taken into consideration when agreeing the placement and identify any areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match.
3.	FS25	Children's records should be removed from foster carers' files.
4.	FS21	The handbook given to foster carers needs to contain up to date information.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Oxford Office

Burgner House

4630 Kingsgate

Oxford Business Park South

Cowley, Oxford

OX4 2SU

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI