

inspection report

Fostering Services

Foster Care Associates Thames Valley

Hale Court

Hale Road

Wendover

Bucks

HP22 6NJ

7th – 11th March 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Foster Care Associates Thames Valley

Tel No

01296 628300

Address

Hale Court, Hale Road, Wendover, Bucks, HP22 6NJ

Fax No

01296 622372

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

H530002079

Name of Registered Provider

Foster Care Associates Ltd

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mrs Deborah Waters

Date of first registration

6th January 2004

Date of latest registration certificate

21st December 2004

Registration Conditions Apply?

NO

Date of last inspection

10/11/03

Date of Inspection Visit		7th March 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		9:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Ms V Khan	128239
Name of Inspector	2	Mr J Griffiths	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		N/A	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		N/A	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mrs D Waters	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Foster Care Associates Thames Valley. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.
<p>Foster Care Associates Thames Valley (FCATV) is registered as an independent fostering agency. It is part of Foster Care Associates, a national organisation providing family placements and a broad range of associated services to local authorities across the country.</p> <p>FCATV operates from Wendover, with offices in Reading and Bletchley, which provide locally based support services. The tasks undertaken by the offices do not, at the present time require these to be registered as separate branches.</p> <p>Services provided by FCATV include the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers, placement support with supervising social workers, training, educational liaison, therapeutic and resource worker services.</p> <p>On 1st February 2005, FCATV had 60 foster families and 74 children/young people placed with foster carers. During the preceeding 12 months, 13 local authorities had made placements of children/young people.</p>

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This was the first inspection since the branch moved from Stanmore to Wendover in 2004. A pre-inspection visit was made to the agency and observation of the panel took place prior to the week of the inspection. The majority of the inspection was carried out over five days by two inspectors.

The agency's policies and procedures were examined and records sampled.

The inspection provided opportunities to meet with children and young people in placements, foster carers, and agency staff at Wendover, Reading and Bletchley, the panel chair and vice chair.

All views from children and young people, foster carers, staff, placing social workers and other professionals surveyed have been taken into account when compiling this inspection report.

Comments from children/young people's questionnaires included; "How good my home is", "FCA doing a very good job", "I get a lot of support from lots of people including foster parents"; "They're really helpful to you".

The inspectors valued the openness and honesty of the registered manager, staff, foster children and foster carers, which contributed to a positive inspection.

The child-centred, holistic approach of the agency became apparent throughout the inspection. The registered manager, staff and foster carers interviewed demonstrated dedication and commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for the children placed. The agency is innovative and forward thinking, and examples of this have been evidenced in this report.

The inspectors have identified a number of areas of good practice, with 18 National Minimum Standards exceeded, 10 National Minimum Standards met, 2 National Minimum Standards nearly met and 2 National Minimum Standards not applicable.

Two requirements have been made regarding the storage of records at the Reading office. Since the inspection, the registered manager has telephoned the Commission to confirm that the requirements made have been addressed.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was exceeded.

The Statement of Purpose clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the agency. The policies and procedures for staff and foster carers accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose

FCA has produced two children's guides, one aimed at under-8s, the other at children of 8 years old and above. Both guides are presented in a bright, interesting and colourful way. Inspectors were shown a visual and audio interactive CD-ROM, which will be given to all

children and young people at the point of being fostered.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

1 Standard was exceeded and 1 Standard was met.

The Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager both demonstrate the necessary skills, qualifications and experience required.

FCATV has two assistant directors who are appropriately qualified with extensive experience, appropriate to their roles.

All staff spoken with during the inspection told the inspector they felt well supported. Inspectors found the agency to be dynamic and yet tightly organised in terms of its operational processes and procedures.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Both Standards were exceeded.

The inspectors saw evidence of the agency being managed efficiently with delivery of a good quality fostering service. The Wendover branch follows FCA national policies and procedures.

The documentation submitted by the agency indicates that there are clear and appropriate policies, systems and processes relating to its activities.

Areas of work are delegated appropriately and the lines of accountability are clear.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

6 Standards were exceeded and 3 Standards were met.

In sampling paperwork, conducting interviews and questionnaire responses the inspectors saw evidence of good outcomes for children and young people. Services which value diversity and promote equality are a priority.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

7 Standards were exceeded and 2 Standards were met.

Staff are organised and managed effectively and receive regular supervision.

Foster carers are given a meticulous handbook that clearly sets out policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details.

The agency has a comprehensive training schedule and places importance on foster carers' attending training.

Records (Standards 24-25)

1 Standard was met and 1 Standard was nearly met.

The children's files sampled by the inspectors were noted to be comprehensive and up to date, with information easy to find. Foster carers that were interviewed knew why the children were in foster care, their legal status and the intended duration of the placements. One office had keys to records being kept in an inappropriate place. A requirement has therefore been made under Regulation 32 that any records maintained in accordance with Regulation 30 or 31 shall be kept securely.

Fitness of Premises (Standard 26)

This Standard was almost met.

Inspectors visited the branch in Wendover and offices in Bletchley and Reading. All were noted to be spacious, well furnished and well equipped, and suitable for the purpose of the agency. The inspector who visited one of the offices noted that it was not possible to lock one room where confidential records were being stored and that this room was without a door. A requirement has therefore been made under Regulation 23 regarding this matter.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

All 3 Standards were met.

The financial viability of the FCATV is managed within the national FCA organisation, with records maintained at Bromsgrove.

The agency has a policy on fostering allowances. All foster carers spoken with confirmed that they receive regular fortnightly payments from the agency. Foster carers payments are made promptly and fees and allowances are reviewed annually.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This Standard was exceeded.

The panel was observed, the chair and vice chair interviewed, minutes from previous panels examined, and the procedural document and the annual report were read as part of the inspection. Inspectors concluded that the panel provides a clear quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process.

Short-Term Breaks (Standard 31)

This Standard does not apply to Foster Care Associates.

Family and friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This Standard does not apply to Foster Care Associates.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report, which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Valerie Khan	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Julian Griffiths	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Clive Wooldridge	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	23	FS26	One room needs to have a lockable door to ensure there are secure facilities for the storage of confidential records.	7/4/05
2	32	FS25	Keys to the cabinets need to be held appropriately to ensure that records are kept securely.	7/4/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS22	Ensure that supervising social workers meet regularly with foster carers in accordance with agency policy and that foster carers files include records of supervisory meetings.
2	FS25	Ensure that all case recording is completed regularly by supervising social workers to include full and legible signatures.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent

5

Survey of placing authorities

YES

Foster carer survey

YES

Foster children survey

YES

Checks with other organisations and Individuals

YES

- Directors of Social services

NO

- Child protection officer

NO

- Specialist advisor (s)

NO

- Local Foster Care Association

NO

Tracking Individual welfare arrangements

YES

- Interview with children

YES

- Interview with foster carers

YES

- Interview with agency staff

YES

- Contact with parents

NO

- Contact with supervising social workers

YES

- Examination of files

YES

Individual interview with manager

YES

Information from provider

YES

Individual interviews with key staff

YES

Group discussion with staff

YES

Interview with panel chair

YES

Observation of foster carer training

NO

Observation of foster panel

YES

Inspection of policy/practice documents

YES

Inspection of records

YES

Interview with individual child

YES

Date of Inspection

7/3/05

Time of Inspection

09.30

Duration Of Inspection (hrs)

94

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

FCA has a well-presented statement of purpose, which clearly sets out in detail all the required information. The main statement covers FCA nationally and there is a supplement that gives specific information about FCA Thames Valley.

When next updated, FCA should change the details to include the Commission For Social Care Inspection rather than the National Care Standards Commission. The management structure of FCATV on the local information supplement also needs to be updated to reflect the changes that have recently been made, in respect of the branch now having two assistant directors.

The statement of purpose is available to parents upon request or is accessible on the website. The placements manager confirmed that the statement of purpose is sent to all local authority social workers on placement and was sent to all placing authorities when it was last updated in 2004.

Inspectors read the agency's policies and procedures, which were consistent with information provided in the statement of purpose.

FCA has produced two children's guides, one aimed at under-8s, the other at children of 8 years old and above. Both are presented in a bright and interesting way.

The document for older children, called the "File of Facts", is formatted in the style of a personal organiser and is packed with information. The language used and the density of the information means that some children will need the help of a staff member or carer to fully understand and use it. Children/young people are expected to sign as having received and read through the document with a supervising social worker. A full complaints procedure with details of advocacy services is included in the file.

The guide for younger children is shorter, with basic information based around the story of a character called Toby Bear. It is sent to children as soon as they are fostered, along with a welcome letter. Each copy of the guide is designed to be personalised with specific information pertinent to the child to whom it is given and their placement. The guide itself does not include a complaints procedure, but refers children to a separate document which they "should have been given" when initially placed, and which they can get from their social worker.

Children and young people who met with the inspectors confirmed that they had received copies of these guides. When next updated, the guides need to state details of the local CSCI office as Aylesbury rather than Harrow.

Inspectors were shown an informative and fun CD-ROM that has been produced nationally

by FCA, which will be given to all children and young people at the point of being fostered. The CD-ROM is a visual and audio interactive welcome guide, which is an alternative to the written material.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.**

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
<p>The agency refers to the registered manager of FCATV as the regional director. Mrs Waters is a qualified social worker who also holds a Certificate in Management Studies. She has also held senior positions as a local authority chairperson and reviewing officer and a senior care manager in independent residential provision. The registered manager is accountable to the Chief Executive and FCA Board of Executive Directors.</p> <p>FCATV has two assistant directors who are appropriately qualified with extensive experience, appropriate to their roles.</p> <p>Feedback from staff and foster carers demonstrated the commitment and visibility of the registered manager and assistant directors.</p> <p>The inspectors saw evidence that the agency is continually developing and looking for ways to improve its service, for example with activities, in carer mentoring, in the independent research study it has commissioned into the outcomes of its services and the piloting of the new foster carer recruitment scheme.</p>	4

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
<p>Mr Jim Cockburn is the registered provider of FCA and is registered at the CSCI office local to the FCA national headquarters in Bromsgrove.</p> <p>The registration of the branch manager formed part of the registration of the FCATV branch when it was located in Stanmore. As part of this process all appropriate checks were undertaken by CSCI at that time.</p> <p>At this inspection, inspectors examined the registered manager of FCATV's personnel records. They included up-to-date CRB, POCA, List 99 and NSPCC checks and local</p>	3

authority checks in respect of every address at which she had resided since the age of 18.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The Wendover branch follows FCA national policies and procedures.

The agency has its own Quality Assurance section headed by a director, which has a formal role in the complaints and representations procedure. The Statement of Purpose states that this section “seeks to place continuous improvement at the forefront of all FCA activities”.

The agency’s fostering panel also has a clear quality-monitoring role, as stated in its operational procedure document. Identified responsibilities include ensuring that assessments have been thorough and rigorous, to ensure that carer applicants are treated fairly, reasonably and consistently, to advise on FCA policy and procedure, to monitor how quickly applications are brought to panel, compliance with performance measures and to receive information about developments from research and practice guidance.

Information is provided to purchasers of services and others. The placement charges vary according to the type of placement, e.g. standard, solo, enhanced, parent and child. Additional charges are clearly defined in the FCA placement charges leaflet, e.g. for supervised contact, additional transport, long term therapeutic support, etc.

There is a clear management structure within the agency and the person to whom each staff member is accountable is clearly identified.

The agency’s reviewing manager plays an important quality assurance role in ensuring all carer reviews take place as required and that all necessary tasks, for example annual unannounced visits, have been completed, and all required paperwork is present in time for the reviews.

The registered manager provided the numbers and details of the significant incidents summarised below. Evidence was supplied to indicate that she had followed the appropriate procedures.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

10

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.	1
Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.	0
Serious complaint about a foster parent.	0
Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.	1
Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
<p>The documentation submitted by the agency indicates that there are clear and appropriate policies, systems and processes relating to its activities. The inspectors noted that these were generally explicitly tied in to the relevant legislation and national minimum standards.</p> <p>Lines of accountability are clearly defined in the agency's management structure, and all staff spoken with were clear to whom they were accountable.</p> <p>The registered manager has a job description on file setting out her duties and responsibilities. The assistant directors' roles and responsibilities are clearly set out in writing, including the responsibility to act for the registered manager in her absence.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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Documentation seen on carers' records, interviews with supervising social workers and with carers themselves indicated that there was rigorous checking and continual monitoring of the quality of the environment within the foster home.

A social work team manager said that it was agency policy unless responsible authorities specifically requested otherwise, that the only cases where children could share a room were those of siblings of the same gender aged under 8 years. An inspector saw an instance of a child's care plan where sharing had been a required part of the plan, and also a room that was being shared by two siblings. It was spacious and appropriately furnished.

Carers and supervising social workers confirmed that comprehensive health and safety checks were carried out on carers homes at regular intervals throughout the annual review process and at other times as required, for example if building work was being undertaken. Examples of completed health and safety checklists were seen on carers' records.

A supervising social worker confirmed that the checking process included the carers' cars or other vehicles if they were used to transport children. Inspectors were informed that the safety of foster carers vehicles was covered during the initial assessment and at annual reviews.

Carers confirmed that they received health and safety training and this training was seen to be included in the 2005 training programme. Inspectors noted that as part of the training programme, carers and foster children are encouraged to attend community safety centres together.

The homes of foster carers visited by inspectors were warm, clean, comfortable, well furnished and well decorated. Children's bedrooms seen were of a good standard and one child expressed particular pride in his room.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met? 4**

The policies and documentation provided by the agency highlight the commitment to ensuring that placements are appropriate to children's/young people's gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality, and that where this is not possible, steps should be taken towards achieving such a placement within 6 weeks.

Documentation repeatedly emphasises the agency's commitment to this, whilst also stating, in its placement policy, that "it is not the policy of FCA ...that the ethnic origin of a child shall automatically, of itself, take precedence over the other assessed needs of the child/young person..." The policy goes on to state that "FCA ensures that all its carers are able to demonstrate understanding and sensitivity to issues of race, language, culture and religion and promote the positive development of a child's identity..... additional support is given when transracial, transcultural or transcommunity placements are made".

One inspector visited such a placement and was satisfied that the agency provides additional and appropriate information and support as necessary.

Inspectors learned that the registered manager or assistant directors must sanction any transracial placements.

The agency's 2004 training programme identifies "Valuing Diversity – Caring for Children and Young People from Different Backgrounds" as a part of its core training curriculum which all main carers must complete prior to their first annual review. Another training event was entitled "Promoting a Positive Identity in Looked After Children".

The agency has stated the measures it has taken with respect to the needs of specific children, for example matching a black male resource worker with a young person to provide a positive role model, and carers taking a black child to an appropriate place of worship and black cultural events.

In terms of encouraging children to develop and pursue interests, the agency's resource team was flexible, pro-active and imaginative in its approach to activities. At a carers' forum attended by an inspector they described their approach as, "if we can do it, we will." Children, staff and carers spoke of a very wide range of activities, from ice skating and skiing to pamper parties, open not only to foster children but also to the sons and daughters of carers. Carers spoke of the value of these in terms of children making friends. Of one group it was said that they had not known each other when they arrived, but within a short space of time it was as if they'd known each other all their lives. Outdoor activity holidays were being planned for the summer.

The agency's placement policy recognises the need to take into account the needs of children with disabilities in the matching process, and to support carers to meet these. Specific training was seen to be included in the 2004 training programme. The agency has provided specific information about how it has enabled the needs of a deaf child to be met, including by means of special equipment and training to the foster carers, a worker able to communicate in BSL, and in liaison with the RNID.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

4

The agency's documentation indicates that the matching process is undertaken with care and on the basis of having received all the relevant information about a child/young person's needs.

One inspector had a detailed discussion with the placements manager who emphasised that the whole matching process is vital to the success of the foster placement. Inspectors saw documentary evidence that the agency is pro-active in approaching the child's social worker requesting more information to assist with the matching process. Good systems are in place with flow-charts and checklists to ensure the smooth running of the process. The placements manager's role is to consider the initial matching, after that the possible match will go to management across FCATV to consider further. Monthly placements reports are completed for the registered manager showing details of referrals and placements made, etc.

Discussion and observation at two carers support groups attended by inspectors indicated that the agency took care to ensure good matches between children and carers, and that placements were not made if they were not thought to be suitable. Carers spoken with were quite clear that to do other than this was not in the interests of the child, the carers or the agency. Foster carers gave detailed accounts of the support they had been given by the agency with transcultural placements. These included enabling the children to practice their religions and providing language interpreters and English lessons.

Carers who were asked said that most placements came to them as a result of emergencies or crises, and that there was no opportunity for prior introduction, but on occasions, wherever possible, this was done. Carers said that a risk in enabling introductions was that the prospective carer would decline to accept the placement with the resulting feelings of rejection for the child. Details of the introduction of one child was seen on a child's record. This had taken place over a 12-day period and had included initial information giving and seeking the child's views, an introductory visit when the child spent the day with the carers and an overnight stay.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The protection of children features prominently in the agency's core foster carer training programme, which all main carers have to complete before their first annual review. Elements of this programme are entitled "The Wellbeing and Protection of Children and Young People" and "Protecting Children and Young People from Danger, Harm and Abuse". Each of these training events is scheduled to be run twice during 2005 at each of the agency's offices. Carers' confirmed to the inspectors that the issues of working with children who had been abused, and recognising signs of abuse were core elements of carer training. The importance of this training was seen to be emphasised to carers by an agency social work manager.

Staff members also identified child protection as core training, which they had all received.

Carers confirmed that there were written Safe Caring guidelines in respect of each child and household. These had been agreed with their supervising social worker, the child and the child's social worker. Examples of safe caring guidelines were seen and the issues covered in the guidelines included smoking in the home and appropriate dress.

Inspectors saw documentary evidence that the agency ensures all adults living in the foster home or who may be with the child/young person for significant times on their own are CRB checked.

Documentation supplied by the agency indicates that appropriate written information is given to carers and children/young people about acceptable and unacceptable forms of punishment, specifically stating that corporal punishment is unacceptable and that training is available in appropriate ways of managing challenging behaviour. Several carers spoke very highly of the "Non-Violent Crisis Intervention" training provided by the agency.

Carers and staff who spoke to inspectors demonstrated their awareness of the vulnerability of looked after children to bullying. Some gave examples of how particular situations had been dealt with. FCA has incorporated a section on bullying into the children/young people's guides and the Foster Carers' Handbook.

Detailed guidance on all the issues described above was seen to be included in the agency's Carers' Handbook.

Carers told an inspector that they thought that the agency shared with them all information that they had about children, but that it sometimes emerged that the information given to the agency itself by children's Local Authority was incomplete or "sanitised". The registered manager has also acknowledged that placing authorities could be more open and forthcoming about children they were trying to place. The registered manager, an assistant director, a social work team manager and the placements manager all confirmed that if information provided by the local authority was incomplete or unclear, the authority was telephoned and more searching questions asked.

The agency has an appropriate and clear written procedure, included in the carers' handbook, for use if a foster child is missing from home. Two carers were able to tell the

inspectors how they had dealt with such a situation.

No children or young people's surveys returned to the CSCI indicated that bullying was an issue, but this matter was not specifically addressed.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency's children's guide (File of Facts) includes a section on contact with family and friends. It sets out the issues involved, how such contact might be arranged, and what might mean there are limitations on contact.

The agency's 2005 training programme includes training for carers on working with birth families. "Promoting Contact" was a part of the core carer training curriculum in the 2004 training programme.

The agency's foster placement agreement form includes a section where contact arrangements are to be specified, and carers spoken to said that their roles in respect of this were clearly spelled out.

The agency's registered manager said that contact did not generally take place in carers' own homes and that carers themselves were not generally used to supervise contact, although the agency's resource workers sometimes were.

Carers confirmed that they recorded the outcomes of contact arrangements and perceived impact on the child, and fed this back to the child's social worker.

Supervising social workers said that they actively advocated on behalf of children with their responsible authorities if it was clear that they were unhappy with contact arrangements.

Carers' confirmed that if they were required to transport children/young people to contact, then they would be reimbursed their expenses by the agency.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

The agency is active and imaginative in seeking children's views about its services. It has an ongoing programme using a computerised interactive questionnaire that is very child-friendly. The registered manager was able to give examples of issues that had been followed up as a result of the information received.

FCA has almost completed the production of a CD-ROM for children placed with its carers, which includes the facility for children to express their views by letter or directly by e-mail.

The agency has commissioned an independent study of " Supports and Outcomes of Placements", which involves a detailed questionnaire to children and young people about their experiences of being fostered through the agency, the things they like and dislike and their wishes for the future.

The agency's 2004 training programme was noted to have training in advanced parenting, including active listening skills.

The agency's resource workers who spoke with an inspector said that their work often placed them in a good position to listen to children's views about their lives and placements, and that these were fed back in writing to the supervising social workers. Supervising social workers confirmed the value of this channel of information.

The agency organises youth forums in which the young people who receive its services can express their views and ideas about them.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

The children's guide (File of Facts) includes a section on health in which the rights of the child/young person with regard to healthcare are set out, and information given as to how to access different areas of healthcare.

The agency has just started to provide foster carers with a "health passport" for each child/young person in which is gathered all important information relating to the their health while they are in the placement and which goes with the child when they move on. Foster carers are required to sign a sheet to confirm receipt of the health passport.

The agency has stated that all children placed with its carers are registered with a GP. In the records sampled, inspectors noted consent forms for routine and emergency treatment. The agency's resource workers assist carers with, for example, getting children to healthcare appointments if needed.

The FCA referral form includes a detailed section on the healthcare needs of the child/young person. The agency's placement policy recognises the need to take into account the needs of children with disabilities in the matching process, and to support carers to meet these.

If thought appropriate, FCA use a "team parenting assessment framework" which is a multi-disciplinary assessment facilitated by a therapist involving other team members, e.g. supervising social worker, education liason worker, resource worker, foster carer and the local authority social worker. The conclusions of the assessment looks at ways to address identified difficulties in order to achieve positive outcomes for the children and young people. Throughout the placement a therapist is available for consultation by the foster carers and those supporting the placement.

The agency's 2005 training programme includes First Aid, Child & Adolescent Mental Health, Sexual Health and Drug and Solvent Abuse. The Health Safety and Security element of the training programme is mandatory for main carers.

Carers described the way in which the particular health needs of children placed with them were met, from which it appeared that they fully understood and acted in accordance with their responsibilities in this respect.

Some carers have attended catheter training that was specifically required to meet the needs of a foster child in placement. The agency provided information to the inspectors about how it has enabled the needs of this child and also a deaf child to be met.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

The agency employs an Education Liaison Officer (ELO) who is a qualified and experienced teacher, with experience of working in a Pupil Referral Unit, and who is also a qualified educational advisor.

The FCA Prospectus states that it is the ELO's job "to find appropriate education provision for every child/young person of school age placed via the agency." Once in education the "ELO will monitor the child's/young person's progress and report to reviews and planning meetings." The ELOs also have a role in advising "foster carers on how best to support the education of the young people they have placed with them.... If a child/young person is out of school for any length of time, the ELOs will usually be able to arrange some alternative education".

Discussion with the ELO and with carers indicated that this role was being effectively fulfilled.

During the inspection, an inspector observed an excluded child receiving individual tuition and a carer spoke of a child placed with her who had been excluded from school but who was now successfully re-integrated. She told the inspector of the support she had received from the ELO and also her supervising social worker in this process.

Carers told inspectors that there was clarity about who was responsible for payment of all costs associated with the education of children placed.

From the records sampled, inspectors were unable to confirm that all personal education plans were in place. There was evidence on the files to suggest that the agency is proactive in requesting that personal education plans are instigated by the local authorities.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The agency has a good leaving care policy that was developed in 2003. The registered manager has acknowledged that FCA has not tended to focus on leaving care arrangements, seeing these as responsibilities of the placing authorities. This is an area that FCA will be developing in the future.

FCA has a Leaving Care Working Party, which meets regularly, and a national FCA Young Person's Conference was held in October 2004 entitled "Moving In Moving On".

The agency's resource manager identified preparation for adulthood and leaving care as an area that needed development, and evidence was seen that he was beginning to actively develop ideas on what could be provided.

Inspectors were unable to locate any pathway plans on the files sampled. Supervising social

workers spoken with said that it was the responsible authorities' responsibility to produce pathway plans as appropriate, there was great variation as to how, or indeed whether, they did this, and that they as supervising social workers would identify where the appropriate action was not being taken, "badger the authorities concerned", and if there was still no action, work with carers to ensure that there was suitable preparation given to the young person.

A training course was held in May 2004 for foster carers/staff on preparing young people for leaving care.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met? 3

Recruitment processes for staff were discussed with the registered manager and policies and procedures were seen.

The main personnel records are maintained at the Head Office of FCA in Bromsgrove. As part of the inspection, inspectors requested a sample of files be brought to the branch for examination. Those records seen indicated that appropriate CRB checks had been obtained, but there was inconsistency about telephoning to follow up written references. This was discussed with the registered manager who was aware of this shortfall and confirmed that FCA is in the process of addressing this. References have been obtained where staff have transferred posts internally.

Supervising social workers were noted to be appropriately qualified and sufficiently experienced to carry out their duties competently. The agency employs independent social workers to undertake the majority of the assessment and approval of prospective foster carers. There are specific job descriptions for the independent social workers. Independent social workers are given training applicable to their role of assessing prospective foster carers. In addition to using independent social workers, the assistant director told one inspector that the agency believes it is important for all supervising social workers to complete at least one new assessment per year.

FCATV employs a therapy services manager and a therapist who are appropriately qualified and appropriately trained to work with children and young people and foster carers and have a good understanding of foster care. Therapists are part of the multi-disciplinary team to support placements.

One inspector asked supervising social workers in one office if they were aware of any recent legislation relating to their role. They were all aware of The Children Act 1989, but not forthcoming about the Children Act 2004 or the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. One of the assistant directors was present and was fully able to answer the inspector's question. The assistant director assured the inspector that all staff are updated on legislation at their training sessions and the Quality Assurance Department also e-mails staff with information

bulletins. The inspector was shown the December 2004 bulletin which was seen to be comprehensive and included information on the Children Act 2004, Regulation in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the CSCI.

The information provided below was provided by the agency. It is noted that 4 members of staff included in the figure of 10 as having left the agency in the last 12 months can be attributed to the office relocating to Wendover.

Total number of staff of the agency:	28	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:	10
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Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

Documentation provided by the agency and interviews with staff indicate that the agency has a clear management structure and all staff have clear lines of accountability.

The entire management team are well qualified and experienced in the field of family placement and all feedback about their availability and support was positive. There had clearly been an amount of preparation in respect of quality performance prior to the inspection and this positively reflects the value placed upon professional practice within the agency.

The agency has a clear and efficient system for ensuring that carer reviews take place as appropriate, with a staff member who has specific responsibility for this work and for chairing the review meetings. She described the system to an inspector, from which it appeared that all aspects of carers' reviews were carried out satisfactorily and consistently. She said that the agency had consciously moved away from using independent reviewing chairs to using an employed member of staff who had no line management responsibility in the agency.

The agency has an on-going carer training programme, with some elements being mandatory for main carers.

Whilst nothing was seen to suggest that the agency's clerical and administrative support services were anything but satisfactory, the resource manager said that additional support specifically for the resources department would enable resource staff to undertake more direct work with children.

Inspectors sampled job descriptions, contracts of employment and conditions of service for staff. Records kept were of a very good quality.

Agency staff demonstrated that they had access to the agency's comprehensive and well produced Employee Guide, which included the grievance and disciplinary procedures, the health and safety policy and the equal opportunities policy.

The structures, systems and internal monitoring procedures in place to manage the service are very good and as such satisfy the inspectors that this Standard is exceeded.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

A theme amongst foster carers questionnaires returned to the CSCI prior to the inspection was that on a few occasions, there had been a shortage of staff. Comments made by some carers during the inspection lead inspectors to query whether there were enough resource workers. These issues were discussed with an assistant director who stated that perhaps at times they had been stretched and in particular at the time of the branch relocation to Wendover. There are also opportunities for staff to gain promotion and this can lead to some disruption with staff moving on. Inspectors learned that the agency is in the process of recruiting 8 sessional workers to complement the resource workers and that levels of staffing and workloads are kept under review. Inspectors concluded that any previous staffing issues have not affected the delivery of a high quality service. FCATV has an adequate number of staff in place, to fulfil its stated aims and objectives in line with the Statement of Purpose.

Social work managers in each of the offices have supervisory responsibility for the supervising of social workers and other team members within each office. Staff confirmed they have access to training, regular supervision and caseload reviews by managers. All staff interviewed talked of being happy in their work, being very well supported and receiving immense job satisfaction. All staff were welcoming to inspectors at each of the centres visited.

The agency holds pre-approval training for prospective foster carers before they commence assessment. Independent social workers undertake the assessment of foster carers using the Form F that covers all required areas of Standard 17.7. Inspectors read Form F assessments that were presented to panel and also randomly selected some during the case tracking process. The assessments were well-written, extremely detailed and evaluated strengths and weaknesses and identified areas where carers may need additional support or guidance. In addition a portfolio of additional information, such as certificates of training, financial information, competencies, feedback from trainers etc is provided to the panel.

One inspector interviewed the foster carer recruitment administrator. Initial enquiries from people wanting to foster are followed up swiftly in writing with an information pack sent the same day. The inspector noted that the administrator is responsible for sending off for references, checks etc. and that she was maintaining an efficient and effective tracking system.

FCA is piloting a new way of recruiting foster carers, which the inspectors were told is extremely successful. The co-ordinator for this scheme is a former foster carer with the agency.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

The agency has comprehensive policies and procedures, which include health and safety, whistle blowing, recruitment of staff and carers, and supervision and support. Staff felt the agency were generous to employees and provided good working conditions.

Foster carers interviewed confirmed they had been given a copy of the Foster Carer Handbook. Inspectors read the Handbook and concluded that it is a clear and comprehensible source of reference for carers. The agency is to be commended on producing the excellent Handbook that includes details of relevant policies and procedures and which is regularly updated.

Foster carers spoke very highly of the out of hours service and that it was reassuring to know that appropriate support was available at all times.

Inspectors saw evidence of public liability and professional indemnity insurance cover in place.

FCA provides membership to an independent voluntary benefit scheme aimed at the needs of foster carers. "The scheme offers free legal advice, legal expenses insurance, advice on tax and personal finance issues".

The agency is considered to be an excellent employer that has strong principles about valuing those who are employed regardless of their role. Many staff employed by the agency knew of the quality of its work in their previous employment and joined because they were in agreement with its values.

Inspectors met with a range of carers and staff and all felt proud of the agency they worked for.

Given the consistency of positive feedback regarding the competence of FCATV as an employer, the inspectors are satisfied that this Standard is exceeded.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

Inspectors noted that the importance of training for foster carers is emphasised, for which the agency is to be commended. All carers are expected to undergo ongoing training and if any carers are reluctant, this will be brought back to panel for discussion earlier than the annual reviews.

All staff in the agency receive induction and in-service training. One new supervising social worker was noted to be following an appropriate induction programme. Supervising social workers confirmed to one inspector their commitment to undertake post-qualifying training.

One of the assistant directors is responsible for developing and setting up the training programme for staff and carers. The training programme is comprehensive and is open to all staff as well as carers. The 2004 training programme was reviewed and updated with a further three core training modules being added for 2005.

As noted in Standard 15, staff are kept informed of changes in legislation or guidance that are relevant to their jobs by training days and by updates from the Quality Assurance team.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

Staff spoken with during the inspection confirmed that they were aware of the agency's policies and procedures and they understood their roles, responsibilities and accountability.

Records sampled by inspectors indicated that supervision of staff is regular and planned. Staff told inspectors that they felt well supported and that senior staff were approachable on any matter. As well as formal one to one supervision sessions with the social work team managers, supervising social workers confirmed that they are also able to discuss any issues at the weekly team meetings. One inspector observed a social work team meeting that was facilitated by an assistant director, who demonstrated effective leadership and encouraged full participation and interaction.

One inspector read the minutes of an independent assessors meeting, an administration team meeting, three agency meetings, a management meeting, two support groups, one

team managers meeting and one supervising social workers meeting. The minutes indicated a high level of involvement and discussion by all who attended.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)**The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****4**

The documentation supplied by the agency indicated that the agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting foster carers. Carers who were asked, described the agency's support as "excellent".

FCA literature states that its foster carers receive supervision and support from a qualified and suitably experienced supervising social worker.

The agency's policy is that its supervising social workers maintain frequent contact with carers by visits and telephone, that therapeutic and educational support is available and that placements are regularly reviewed.

The agency includes as part of its standard package 21 nights respite care a year to allow foster carers to have a break.

Support is provided through carers' forums and local carers' support groups, and there is an explicit expectation that carers will attend a high proportion of these events.

The 2005 training programme shows local carers' support groups facilitated 8 times a year in each of five local areas covered by the agency, and 3 foster carer forums, which "all main carers are expected to attend".

The agency has an out-of-hours support service available to carers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Carers confirmed that this service was available and effective. One carer spoke highly of the quality and effectiveness of the support provided; another described the service as "excellent", and gave a practical example of effective support given on a bank holiday. Another thought that the fact that the service was staffed by people who were not personally known to the carers (because it is a national FCA resource) was negative. However the agency has since introduced a system whereby the service will pass the enquiry on to a local staff member to deal with if necessary. Agency management was seen to positively encourage carers to use the out-of-hours on-call service for support. Issues taken by carers to the out-of-hours on-call service are notified to local management and supervising social workers by e-mail within a short time for follow-up.

The agency is to be commended for its carers' handbook, which is comprehensive and detailed. It contains all information, policies and procedures likely to be needed. It is given to every carer/caring household and carers said that they had to sign to confirm that they had received a copy. They said that it was regularly updated. Carers were positively encouraged by the agency to make suggestions as to how the handbook could be improved and developed.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The agency's foster care agreement format complies with the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2001.

Each foster carer is supervised by a qualified supervising social worker. Inspectors saw documentary evidence that records were maintained of supervising social work visits to foster carers and children in placement, which included at least one unannounced visit per year. One inspector was unable to verify that supervision had been taken place monthly in accordance with agency policy as some supervision records were unable to be located in the files sampled.

Foster carers are given a handbook that clearly sets out policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. The agency is to be commended on the handbook, which is a comprehensible source of reference for carers.

FCA offer various forms of support to foster carers including; access to out of hours support, 21 days paid respite per year, regular support group meetings, resource workers to work with the children and young people, organised activities for children and young people, an educational liaison officer to support carers in negotiating with schools and promoting educational needs, therapist who facilitate a "team parenting" approach, a comprehensive training programme including access to NVQ 3 and membership of an independent voluntary benefit scheme.

The agency has an appropriate complaints procedure, which is widely available. Foster carers, foster children and placing officers surveyed confirmed they knew how to make a complaint. During the 12 months February 2004-February 2005 FCATV received no complaints. Following a serious complaint or incident, the agency procedure would dictate completion of a comprehensive foster carer review.

Information about procedures to deal with investigations into allegations is made known to staff, carers and children and young people. In addition, FCATV held a training course in October 2004 on "Safer Caring-Minimising Allegations Against Foster Carers".

Systems are in place to ensure that records about allegations of abuse are kept and monitored. The agency has a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

The agency's 2004 and 2005 carer training schedules were seen and these indicated an appropriate, comprehensive and on-going programme of training, linked to the NVQ Level 3, and including mandatory elements that have to be completed by main carers within a specified time.

The agency's 2005 training schedule includes a course on safer caring - "Minimising Allegations Against Foster Carers", and a workshop for male carers.

The agency provides specific information for the sons and daughters of prospective foster carers and invites them to attend a training/information session. The literature states that FCA has set up groups for sons and daughters to help the agency understand what their needs and experiences are.

Mandatory and additional specialist training is provided, with "attendance...a pre-requisite for continued approval as a foster carer". This point was emphasised to carers by one of the agency's senior managers at a carers' forum meeting attended by an inspector. It was evident from the Forum that the agency supports carers in attending training events by, for example repeating key events in evening sessions, paying expenses, including childcare, and providing resource workers to care for foster children during the carers' absence. There is encouragement for carers to undertake NVQ level 3 in Health & Social Care. This will be made available through local offices rather than centrally, if enough carers enrol in each area.

The agency is to be commended on the importance it places on foster carers' attending training. Creative ways of providing training to foster carers were discussed with an assistant director, with the agency prepared to consider taking training out to individual foster carers if individual circumstances dictate this. The agency are very clear, that if foster carers do not attend training, then they will be brought to the panel sooner, e.g. at 6 months intervals, for review. Section 8 of the Foster Care Agreement identifies the carer review as "an opportunity to consider what training has taken place and to identify future training needs". Participants in training courses are asked to complete evaluation forms after the event so that the agency can monitor the quality and relevance of the training.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care, which details the nature, and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Children's files were sampled and these were found to be comprehensive, up to date and information was easy to find.

There was documentary evidence that the agency had been proactive in liaising with the children and young people's placing social workers.

Foster carers who were interviewed knew why the child/young person was in foster care, their legal status and the intended duration of the placement.

A written policy is held on access to personal files by carers and children.

Foster placement agreements were on case files and carers confirmed that they were aware of their contents.

Carers are able to attend training on life story work. At a support group attended by an inspector, the life story training course was promoted to carers. Memory boxes and cameras are provided to assist in recording significant life events.

Foster carers are expected to maintain records about the children in placement that are read by supervising social workers on their visits to carers' homes.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met? 2**

Main staff files are maintained at the head office in Bromsgrove and inspectors requested a sample be brought to Wendover for examination.

Some foster carers' files and children's files were read during the case tracking process. The files are colour coded for ease of use.

Inspectors noted that systems are in place to ensure that the branch manager monitors all matters in Schedule 7/ Regulation 42. One inspector looked at these records and noted they were being stored securely.

As per Schedule 2/Regulation 22, a record in the form of a register showing details in respect of each child placed and a record in respect of each person working for the agency are maintained.

One inspector noted that some recording 'contact' sheets had not been signed by supervising social workers and in some cases, the inspector was unable to verify that 'contact' sheets had been completed since November 2004.

The foster carer handbook contains a section on confidentiality and sets out the expectations of foster carers. All carers are expected to keep records securely locked away as per the foster care agreement.

All FCATV staff have contracts, which contain information about the requirement to uphold confidentiality. Members of the foster panel sign a confidentiality agreement, which is renewed every year.

The inspector who visited one office discovered that keys to records in two cabinets were being kept in an inappropriate place. A requirement has therefore been made under Regulation 32 that any records maintained in accordance with Regulation 30 or 31 shall be kept securely.

The information recorded below was provided by the agency. The weekly payment is an inclusive payment including children's pocket money.

Inspectors were informed by the registered manager that the figures below reflect that some carers transferred within FCA due to the branch relocation.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			73
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			53
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			50
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			28
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			19
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	350	Maximum £	700

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- **The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.**

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Inspectors visited the branch in Wendover and offices in Bletchley and Reading. All were noted to be spacious, well furnished and well equipped, and suitable for the purpose of the agency. All offices have reception areas and are open during normal office hours. Car parking is available at the branch and the offices. Inspectors noted there to be disabled access to the Wendover branch and Bletchley office of FCATV.

There are appropriate security systems in place.

There are efficient administration systems including a computerised database. All staff have access to computers.

The agency's insurance certificate was seen.

The inspector who visited one of the offices noted that it was not possible to lock one room where confidential records were being stored and indeed this room was without a door. A requirement has therefore been made under Regulation 23 regarding this matter.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The financial viability of the FCATV is managed within the national FCA organisation, with records maintained at Bromsgrove.

The main financial function of FCA takes place at the Central Services Financial section.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The processes for receiving payment from local authorities and for paying carers are clearly identified. There is clear and detailed analysis of income and expenditure.

The agency's prospectus provides detailed information about the costs of each of its services, although many costs are worked out on a case-by-case basis, depending on individual need.

The agency's terms and conditions state that its charges are normally reviewed on 1st April each year and changes notified in advance.

The branch manager is responsible for an annual budget and sets business plan targets for the branch and its offices.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The agency has a written policy on fostering allowances.

All foster carers spoken with confirmed that they receive regular fortnightly payments from the agency. The payments include elements of their remuneration, costs of providing care and pocket money allowances for children in placement. Carers spoken with were satisfied with the allowances received.

Pocket money is agreed between the foster carer, child and the placing authority social worker to reflect the particular circumstances of each individual child placed.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	4
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The operation of the agency's fostering panel is the subject of a highly detailed operational procedure document. The document specifies that prospective panel members be subject to the appropriate checks, which must be clear before the appointment can proceed. Panel members are required to sign a declaration of interest form and in addition, at each panel, members are required to make any declarations of interest.

All members of the panel received an induction and a handbook, which includes a copy of the panel operating procedures, the agency's statement of purpose and prospectus.

As part of the inspection, inspectors read minutes of the three previous panels and observed the panel, which dealt with annual reviews, applications to foster, changes of approval, and de-registrations. The inspectors were confident from observing the panel that members had read the documents in advance of the panel and came fully prepared. The panel were rigorous and had thorough discussions of the presenting documentation. The panel invited foster carers in and asked them for their views on fostering and it was noted that all panel members showed an active interest in what the applicants were saying.

There was documentary evidence that the agency consults with the placing authority social workers and with foster children in preparation for carers' reviews. Children are sent thank you letters if they have contributed to foster carers' reviews.

The panel provides a clear quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process.

Written procedures cover decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement. Recommendations from the panel go to the registered manager who is the FCATV decision maker.

The chair and vice chair of the panel told one of the inspectors that they are actively trying to locate an appropriate education professional to join the panel.

The panel chair completed a detailed annual report covering the period December 2003 to December 2004.

The panel have access to the agency's legal advisors in Bromsgrove and would also

approach the Fostering Network about any queries if needed.

The panel are encouraged to attend any of the training courses that are run by the agency and panel members have each been given a copy of the 2005 training manual. The last panel training session was run by one of the assistant director's in November 2004 on "Components of a Good Form F, Analysing and Assessing." Forthcoming panel training is scheduled for June 2005.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	9
This Standard is not applicable.		

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
This Standard is not applicable.	

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 7th – 11th March 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

"No factual inaccuracies found.

We are very happy with the report."

- Deborah Waters, Director, 3rd May 2005.

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I, _____ of Foster Care Associates
confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation
of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that
I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with
these.

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation _____

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, _____, of Foster Care Associates
am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate
representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above
date(s) for the following reasons:

--	--

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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