



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Futures For Children**

**69 College Road  
Maidstone  
Kent  
ME15 6SX**

*Lead Inspector*  
Sophie Wood

*Announced Inspection*  
13th June 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

<b>Reader Information</b>	
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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://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](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

<b>Name of service</b>	Futures For Children
<b>Address</b>	69 College Road Maidstone Kent ME15 6SX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 673555
<b>Fax number</b>	01622 683555
<b>Email address</b>	lynnstout@futures.for.children.org
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Futures for Children
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mrs Muzammil Mirza
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      14th February 2006

## Brief Description of the Service:

The 'Futures for Children' fostering agency is based in Maidstone and is currently registering other offices in neighbouring counties. It is the intention of the agency to develop small groups of carers, from a wide range of geographical locations, with qualified staff support close by, in line their 'Maidstone' model.

According to its Statement of Purpose, the agency seeks to provide, 'a flexible, caring and imaginative foster care service...to give children and young people the opportunity to become valued members of society'.

The agency seeks to provide a variety of placements, based upon the presenting needs of the children / young people referred. These include; short and long term, emergencies, bridging, enhanced, eg. disability / illness, sibling groups and parent and child placements.

All Social Workers employed by the agency are qualified and experienced and other employees include a qualified Director of Therapy and sessional workers. For those young people not in mainstream school, the agency funds a minimum of 10 hours sessional work per week.

The agency provides continued training for carers and is currently focusing upon the NVQ qualification. Out of hours support is provided by the agency staff team via an on call system and carers receive three weeks' holiday pay annually.

# SUMMARY

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

This announced key inspection commenced on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2006 and was conducted over four days.

Time was spent interviewing the registered manager and other key personnel. Written records were scrutinised and three sets of foster carers, including the children placed with them, were visited in their own homes.

Additional inspection material was received through the manager's returned pre – inspection documentation and the questionnaires received from carers, children and placing social workers.

It was also very helpful to meet with a placing social worker during a carer visit, in order to fully explore a sibling placement, and holding a group meeting with carers and children, supplied additional pertinent information.

The previous inspection visit, conducted in February this year, highlighted a number of areas requiring attention and it was positive to find from this visit, that every requirement had been either fully or partly addressed.

It is also recognised that the last few months have presented challenges, in terms of a staff member leaving and covering staff maternity leave.

Such events have had an impact upon service delivery, however; strategies have been implemented in an attempt to reduce negative consequences and these were discussed in detail with the manager and directors.

The findings from this visit identified good outcomes for children and young people in the agency's care. Carers are clear about their own roles and responsibilities and provide safe, nurturing placements.

The agency remains keen to improve its own practice and readily described a placement where it felt it had not provided optimum support and even suggested this placement be visited, in order for the inspector to receive first hand feedback from the carer.

Time and resources must now focus upon those previous requirements, which have been partly implemented and need to become firmly embedded in practice, such as case files for children and matching evidence.

From this particular visit, the main area identified as requiring prompt attention is concerned with the role of the registered manager, who, because of the above factors, has been heavily involved in daily operational issues, thus preventing her from spending sufficient time on the other key areas associated with her role.

## **What the service does well:**

The agency provides regular, good quality support to carers, who in turn, feel equipped to provide a quality service to those in their care.

Written procedural guidance is clear and concise and subject to ongoing review.

Agency staff possess the skills, qualifications and experience needed to effectively run a fostering service.

Assessments of carers and the recruitment of agency staff is thorough, therefore, vulnerable young people are protected.

Young people receive the support they need to achieve their educational potential and the services to those approaching adulthood are commended.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

Pro – forma's regarding matching evidence have been devised; these need to be fully implemented.

Almost every outstanding carer annual review has been conducted.

Separate health care sections have now been added to children's files and there is greater evidence to demonstrate placing authorities being 'chased' for missing information.

As was required from the last inspection, all incidents falling under Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are being reported to the Commission within the required timescales.

## **What they could do better:**

The agency needs to ensure the contents of health sections within children's files are of the same good standard and that foster carers are all given the opportunity to attend relevant health promotion training.

The registered manager must be given sufficient time and resources to focus upon her monitoring and quality assurance role.

Staffing levels should be reviewed, and within this, consideration should be given to reducing the amount of time the registered manager devotes to carrying an active caseload.

Consultation processes with regards fostered and birth children should be developed further.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:**

12

Whilst the health needs of children are promoted by the agency, this standard would be improved through more detailed record keeping and additional training for carers.

**The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is adequate.**

## **EVIDENCE:**

The contents of children's files were scrutinised and it was positive to find that all now have a separate, dedicated health section; some held more information than others, and in one, the topic of 'medical consent' was insufficiently recorded.

It was further noted that training for carers in March this year, focused on 'healthy living' as a core subject and there are plans for this to continue, in order for all carers to attend.

The contents of the Foster Carer Agreement and Handbook clearly describe the carer's role in terms of their responsibilities to promote and safeguard the health of those in their care and those carers visited and interviewed, demonstrated an acute awareness of this.

## Staying Safe

### **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

**The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

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

The service is run by a competent, experienced group, however; written information pertaining to 'matching' still does not do justice to the actual practice of the agency.

An experienced panel works effectively to provide safeguards for children, carers and the agency.

**The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is good.**

### **EVIDENCE:**

The agency effectively implements its own sound and robust recruitment procedures; hence, staff are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake the duties they perform and have been thoroughly vetted before taking up their posts.

The recruitment of carers is equally sound and the inspection of Form F assessments confirmed this. Three sets of foster carers were visited in their own homes, where evidence was seen to support that households are safe and welcoming to children. Additional written evidence found that the number of outstanding carer annual reviews highlighted at the last inspection, has dramatically reduced, with only a few remaining and these are booked.

From reading carer and children's files, and through the above visits, it was evident that placements have only been made as a result of good matching processes; this is also borne out through the number of placements becoming long term and stable. However, the agency still needs to produce greater written evidence to support and demonstrate how such placement decisions are reached, upon a referral first being received.

The child protection policies and procedures of the agency are clear and carers know what to report and to whom. The topic of 'safe care' is being particularly pursued at present and it would be of particular good practice for carers to write their own household procedures, to be monitored at each annual review. The foster carer handbook details clear guidance on behaviour management and the steps to follow in the event of a child being missing from home. Whereby any concerning incidents have occurred, the agency has readily informed the Commission and other necessary third parties.

The personnel records of staff are securely held in the central head office and the contents of these reflect the recruitment policy and procedure in place. Written references, supported by telephone verification, CRB and other statutory checks are conducted and in place, before an employee can commence with their post and the agency now has a core staff team with a good mix of skills and interests within the fostering field. Whereby social work students are on placement with the agency, these are usually in their second or third year and are clearly being supervised and monitored, in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations and good practice guidance.

Written guidance pertaining to the role and function of the panel is detailed and clear. All members have undergone CRB disclosures and there remains a good mix of independent and agency staff members from varied child – care backgrounds; all have signed confidentiality and conflict of interest disclosures. Good quality written minutes demonstrate the meetings are well – planned, with each item thoroughly discussed and debated. One director is a panel advisor, without a casting vote and the responsible individual, who does not join panel meetings, is the decision maker for the agency.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

**The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

7, 13.

Diversity among children and carers is valued and young people receive the help they need to reach their academic potential. (Standard 31 is not applicable).

**The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is good.**

## **EVIDENCE:**

Whilst it is recognised that the geographical area covered predominantly reflects a 'white middle class' group, the agency continues to actively seek to recruit carers from as wide a range of backgrounds as this factor allows. This is reflected within the register of foster carers, which shows married couples, co habiting partners and single carers. Within such groups, some variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds is reflected and a range of skills is offered by each household.

The agency is therefore able to accommodate youngsters with a range of presenting needs, including particular cultural/religious needs, health issues and/or disabilities.

Core training for carers includes subjects such as valuing diversity and equal opportunities.

As was found from the previous inspection, the vast majority of the children and young people in placement are in full time educational provision and it was most positive to find that carers take this aspect of their role very seriously.

Excellent examples were seen, whereby carers have advocated tirelessly to secure the most appropriate school placements and one set of carers had purchased individual computer equipment for a child in their care, because of specific learning needs.

The agency clearly outlines the responsibilities of carers to promote educational attainment within its written guidance and its own bank of sessional workers may be used to provide meaningful daytime activities for children who are not in full time school.

Following a recommendation made from the previous inspection, the manager is now starting to collate statistical information in order to monitor school placements and the educational outcomes of the children and young people placed within the agency.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

### **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

**The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

10, 11.

Children and young people benefit by being supported to maintain contact with those who are important to them.

Sound consultation processes ensure the views and opinions of carers and children are responded to.

**The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is good.**

### **EVIDENCE:**

Through reviewing children's individual files and from speaking to them and their carers, good sources of evidence were found to demonstrate that contact arrangements are being well – supported.

Wherever necessary, the agency assists with travel and supervision, as do many of the carers.

The topic of contact is clearly covered within the agency's training programme, with its importance promoted within the foster carer's handbook.

The overall feedback received from carers, with regards consultation processes was generally good. The majority stated that their link workers keep them readily updated with regards agency developments, however; some said they would have liked greater consultation and information earlier this year, given two members of staff leaving. More positively, they felt able and encouraged to speak openly at forums such as annual reviews and many said their own children are spoken to by their link workers during home visits.

Following the previous inspection, it was positive to find that work is being completed with regards seeking the opinions of children in placement, and

birth children, at their own carer's annual review; this recommended action was made from the previous inspection and has now become a requirement. The written responses received from placing authorities was positive, with the majority stating that the agency works 'very well' in partnership with them. A good practice recommendation from this outcome group is for the agency to consider the benefits of devising and implementing additional ways to obtain the views and opinions of all of its stakeholders periodically and not just in time with annual reviews.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

14, 29.

Teenagers are provided with clear guidance and advice from their carers to prepare them for adult living.

Carers benefit from being paid their agreed allowances on time.

## The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is excellent.

### EVIDENCE:

A case tracking exercise was undertaken with regards a particular individual who will soon be making the transition towards independent living.

It was disappointing to find that the placing authority has only very recently commenced with pathway planning and transitional arrangements, thus the individual remains unclear about future options.

The carers however, are to be commended for their own pragmatic and structured approach, supported by the agency, in determining with the young person, the options and realistic targets ahead during the forthcoming year.

This is particularly positive, given that the carers are 'very new' to fostering and this is their first placement.

During the course of the visit to their home, they described the very practical methods they are using, in terms of boundary setting and teaching appropriate independence skills, and the young person confirmed having a clear sense of direction and purpose, thanks to the support and guidance being received from the foster carers.

This is an excellent example of a young person being appropriately matched to carers with the skills and insight into the needs of teenagers.

Through the perusal of records and from direct feedback received from carers, sufficient evidence was again found to demonstrate that allowances and expenses are paid correctly and on time.

A separate, dedicated finance team is in place at the main head office and through working to clear and explicit financial procedures, problems and difficulties with payments occur very rarely.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

**The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

1,2,4,5,16,17,18,21,22,23,24,25,26

Clear written documentation is provided for all interested parties.  
Carers and children benefit from the leadership and work practices of a qualified, motivated team of professionals.  
The quality of support and training for carers enhances the outcomes for children and young people.  
The registered manager needs to be given the time and resources to focus upon her monitoring role.

**The overall quality of the service in this outcome group is adequate.**

**EVIDENCE:**

Under this outcome group, focus and attention was paid particularly towards the role and function of the registered manager of the service.

Whilst it was clearly evident that she possesses the skills, qualifications and expertise to fulfil her role, recent events, including staffing absences and the loss of personnel, resulting in the agency's decision to give her a working caseload, has had a negative impact upon her ability to focus upon monitoring and quality assurance. That said, she continues to provide quality review reports; however, she is currently unable to give this task the time and attention needed to ensure these are of the standard she is capable of.

It was very positive to find clear sources of evidence to demonstrate how this agency truly values its staff; generous terms and conditions were seen and in particular, those experiencing personal or other external difficulties were being very well supported. This is an agency that values loyalty and remunerates individuals accordingly.

The current staffing situation reflects the majority of the team as being part time and the registered manager is carrying an active caseload. Although carers stated they feel well – supported in most cases, the one negative theme was attributed to link worker availability and for such reasons the agency is required to review its current staffing levels.

This is not an indication as to the quality and calibre of those in post; moreover, it is indicative that the number of hours available may not currently be sufficient.

Another indicator includes children's and other administrative records, as whilst these contain most of the elements required, the overall quality and monitoring of these is not currently receiving the attention required, due to the range of commitments of the registered manager.

# 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

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

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	2
<b>9</b>	3
<b>15</b>	3
<b>30</b>	4

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	3

<b>ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	4
<b>29</b>	3

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

YES

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

**STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS12	15(1)	<p>The fostering service provider shall promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. This requirement is made within the context of the fostering service ensuring it continues with its training programme for foster carers, to ensure that all receive it. Furthermore, all children's files are to hold the level and detail of health information records as was found in some cases, though not all.</p> <p><b><i>This requirement is carried over from the previous inspection, although it is recognised that adequate progress has been made.</i></b></p> <p>An action plan, detailing how and by when, this shortfall will be addressed is required by the date shown opposite.</p>	10/08/06
2.	FS4	42	<p>The agency is required to ensure the registered manager be given sufficient time and resources to focus upon the monitoring aspects associated with her role.</p>	10/08/06

			An action plan, detailing how this shortfall will be addressed is required by the date shown opposite.	
3.	FS17 & FS22	19	The agency is required to review its current staffing structure / levels, to ensure it has the required amount to provide satisfactory levels of support to its carers, without compromising the position of the registered manager. An action plan, detailing how this shortfall will be addressed is required by the date shown opposite.	10/08/06
4.	FS11	18	The agency is required to review its current consultation mechanisms, to ensure that all stakeholders be given sufficient opportunity to share their views and opinions as to the ongoing operation of the fostering service. This requirement particularly applies to fostered and birth children. An action plan, detailing how this shortfall will be addressed is required by the date shown opposite.	10/08/06

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS8	It is strongly recommended that the agency implement the same good quality written matching evidence that was found in some cases, though not in others.

2.	FS23	It is recommended that the range and scope of training, available for foster carers be expanded upon.
4.	FS24 & FS25	It is strongly recommended that the registered manager be afforded sufficient time and resources to focus upon the task of file monitoring.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

Maidstone Local Office

The Oast

Hermitage Court

Hermitage Lane

Maidstone

ME16 9NT

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.csci.org.uk](http://www.csci.org.uk)

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