

# FOSTERING SERVICE

## **Northumberland Fostering Service**

### **Family Support & Placement Service**

**Tweed House**

**Hepscott Park**

**Morpeth**

**Northumberland**

**NE61 6NF**

*Lead Inspector*

Hilary Stewart and Dennis Bradley

*Announced Inspection*

16th, January, 2006

09:20

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- x Put the people who use social care first
- x Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- x Be an expert voice on social care
- x 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>	Northumberland Fostering Service
<b>Address</b>	Family Support & Placement Service Tweed House Hepscott Park Morpeth Northumberland NE61 6NF
<b>Telephone number</b>	01670 534450
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<b>Email address</b>	bross@northumberland.gov.uk
<b>Provider Web address</b>	
<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Northumberland County Council SSD
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mr Bob Ross
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service
<b>No. of places registered (if applicable)</b>	0
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# **SERVICE INFORMATION**

## **Conditions of registration:**

**Date of last inspection**      7th February 2005

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

Northumberland Fostering Service is part of the Family Support and Placement Service based at Tweed House, Hepscott Park, Stannington, Morpeth. The Fostering Service recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people. They include long and short-term foster care and short break care.

The service also includes the 'Project Foster Care Scheme'. This provides care for more challenging children and young people by carers who have had extra training. A planned joint project with North Tyneside Council is currently underway. This 'Treatment Foster Care' scheme (which is named Chrysalis) will provide therapeutic placements for up to six children. The Northumberland team are also part of a regional project (Sahara Project) to recruit and advise foster carers from the black and ethnic community.

At the time of the inspection the service was supporting approximately 222 placements. The Fostering Service operates with a team of supervising social workers, the manager and administrative support staff.

# SUMMARY

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

This inspection was announced and started at 0940hrs. It took place over a period of 7 days from the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006 until the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2006. Three inspectors were involved and they spoke to the staff and their managers. They also visited the young people and their foster carers. Questionnaires were sent out to the young people their foster carers and staff. Records were also examined.

At the time of the inspection the 'Children's Service Manager of the Family Support and Placement Service' was on sick leave so the manager referred to in the report is the manager of the fostering service who deputises when the 'Children's Service Manager' is unavailable.

## What the service does well:

- The service has the investors in people accreditation, which shows that the young people receive a service from well-trained staff that are supported by their managers.
- Northumberland Fostering Service carry out a thorough assessment of people who want to become foster carers to make sure that children are looked after by people who will care for them properly. One young person said " It is like having two sets of parents, one who looks after you and loves you (foster parents) and the other who just loves you".
- The fostering service provides good training to foster carers so they learn how to look after the children well.
- When people are interested in becoming foster carers the staff respond to their enquiries quickly so they know that their interest is taken seriously.
- Foster carers get a lot of support to work with the children so they feel confident and stay being a foster carer for Northumberland for a long time. One foster carer said, "It is a happy caring service and the staff listen to you".
- The fostering service will help to arrange for young people to stay with their foster carers into adulthood if it is the best thing for them.
- Children are supported well with their education and contact with family and friends.

## What has improved since the last inspection?

- The fostering service is now working more efficiently with the private fostering agencies to make sure young people get the right placement for them.
- A marketing officer has been employed to recruit more foster carers. This will give young people more choice of foster carer and more chance of staying in the area were they are from.
- The fostering service has improved how it helps children and young people be healthy and well educated so they can have more opportunities when they are adults. More of them have plans for their education and health.
- The 'Local Authority Review Team' now carry out the foster carer reviews so more are happening on time.
- The fostering service records more information on their children's register so they have accurate information and know where children are.
- Staff records show that they have been checked properly so the children and young people are kept safe.
- The 'Education Support for Looked After Children Team' works closely with the placements manager so if a child has to move schools it is well planned and children experience less disruption.
- Carers can now get advice from an educational psychologist directly so if children need extra support they get it more quickly.

## What they could do better:

- Although the fostering service provides good training more foster carers need to attend it. Especially the family and friends carers so they know how to protect and care for the children well.
- All of the foster carers need to have training in child protection to make sure they know how to help children who have been abused.
- The fostering service needs to have a member of staff to assist the manager and be in charge in their absence so the work continues to be carried out.
- The fostering service needs to get better at visiting foster carers regularly.
- Hand written records need to be clear so they can be easily understood when people need to find out information.
- Family and friends need to be assessed within the set timescales so children know where they are going to live as soon as possible.
- The fostering service should find out how many children are not attending school so they can make plans to support them with their foster carers.

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**

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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 outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

**The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

12

Northumberland Fostering Service monitors and promotes the health of children placed with its foster carers to make sure that they develop to their full potential.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The children and carers records showed that the children have regular health checks. Foster carers said that the supervising social workers made regular checks of carer's records to make sure that they have been to the dentist and opticians. If there are any issues relating to children's health they are recorded by the agency.

Some of the things children told us were "we eat lots of fruit and vegetables" "they feed me and show me how to keep clean and tidy" and " we talk about what food is good for you and how important personal hygiene is".

Foster carers said that they ensure children are given information about how to have a healthy lifestyle and they are provided with nutritious meals. The carers records showed that they had been given relevant information about the health care needs and histories of the children placed with them. Foster carers have arranged for the children to be registered with a doctor and dentist and have written guidance about how to look after the health of the children and young people in their care. Their training covered health issues that might arise for looked after children.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

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

Northumberland Fostering Service is managed by staff who have the necessary training and skills to ensure children are well looked after and are living in a placement where their needs can be met.

Staff and most of the carers know about child protection procedures and how to keep the children safe.

People who apply to be foster carers are checked out thoroughly before they are approved to do so, so children are kept safe. Staff are vetted before they can work for the service and the 'Fostering Panel' monitors the children in foster placements to make sure they are kept safe and well looked after.

Complaints are dealt with so any problems are attended to quickly which helps good relationships to be maintained.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Training is provided for foster carer in child protection procedures so they know how to keep the children in their care safe. Carers said that child protection training has been provided but not all carers had attended. One carer was not sure what to do if they suspected a child was being abused. The manager said that staff work hard to support and encourage foster carers to attend training but some don't, they are looking into ways of encouraging all carers to attend training at the present time.

Children who were spoken to or completed the questionnaires said that they felt "safe" at their foster home that their foster parents were "kind to me and love me a lot".

Staff said that the service tries hard to make safe, caring and secure placements where children's welfare is safeguarded. Foster placement agreements showed the needs of the child had been taken into account when planning the placement. Carers said that where possible planning meetings and introductory visits take place.

Staff and foster carers files showed that the Local Authority carries out all of the necessary safeguarding checks. All prospective carers are vetted as part of their assessment. Some carers said that the assessment takes a long time but they understood as the foster service had to be sure that the children would be safe.

Records of the 'Fostering Panel' showed that the quality and thoroughness of the assessment of potential foster carers was checked. They also made sure that children and young people got the right placement. The manager said that plans are being made for a member of staff from another Local Authority to become the independent chairperson for the fostering service panel.

Staff said that they have been trained in child protection procedures and the identification of abuse. They knew what to do if an incident was reported to them. Staff records showed that they are qualified and experienced so they know how to make sure the children are well looked after.

Most of the carers and children know what to do if they want to make a complaint 7 children stated in their questionnaires (25 were returned) that they did not know how to make a complaint. Records showed that complaints were being dealt with.

The foster carers' homes that were visited during the inspection were adequately furnished and clean. Health and safety checks of foster carers' homes and vehicles were done as part of their initial assessment and at their annual reviews. Carers who look after disabled children are provided with specific training.

The Council has given a high priority to the recruitment of new carers and they have recruited a marketing member of staff.

# Enjoying and Achieving

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

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

7,13 and31

The specific needs of children are considered when making placements to ensure that the child's self worth and confidence are enhanced. The educational achievement of children was promoted and they received planned support to meet their educational needs so they have more choice of work or further education when they are older.

The service has policies and procedures in place for short breaks to ensure the needs of the children are met.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The foster carer assessments showed how the applicant's capacity to look after a child from a different cultural, religious, or ethnic background had been looked into. Foster carers received written guidance and training that covered the principles of valuing diversity and anti-oppressive practice. It is intended that a scheme called the Sahara project, which is run jointly with Gateshead Council will provide placements for children from black and ethnic minorities. There was evidence that the matching of carers to children included consideration of the way in which the specific needs of each child could be met. Foster carers have access to written guidance and training on educational issues. Part of the 'Education Support Team for Looked after Children' role is to provide support to children in foster care with their educational placements. The manager of the team said that they can provide easily accessible advice about any issues to do with education. Foster carers are provided with training about schools and education not all of them attend. The manager said that they are at present looking at how they can make the training more accessible

to foster carers. Foster carers now have access to an Educational Psychologist for advice.

It would be beneficial to the service if systems were in place to monitor the attendance and educational achievement of children in foster care. The manager said that this is an issue that the 'Multi Agency Looked After Partnership' will be looking into.

Personal Education Plans (P.E.Ps) were in place for the young people who were 'case tracked'.

Short break carers access the same training as other foster carers and this covered shared care/working with parents. The scheme has its own policies and procedures in respect of meeting the particular needs of children receiving short-breaks.

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

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

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

10 and 11.

When appropriate children are supported to have regular contact with their family and friends so they can keep relationships going so they are still part of their family.

The foster service seeks the views of the children in their care so they know that they are listened to.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers have guidance and training about supporting foster children to maintain and, where appropriate develop, their family contacts. Where possible contact arrangements are agreed before a placement starts. Foster carers said that they know about contact arrangements for the children they care for and some put a lot of work into making sure contact with their families happens such as arranging transport.

Training for carers includes sessions on listening to children. The majority of children who were seen or completed a questionnaire said that their foster carers listened to their views and opinions. One young person said "I told them about the problems I had and they helped me deal with them" another said, "the personal problems I suffered when I first came into care are sorted out now". Young people are encouraged and supported to contribute to the reviews of their placements.

The children's files looked at during the inspection showed that children were being visited by their social worker so they do have the opportunity to speak to them.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

**The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

29

Most foster carers are paid promptly and at the agreed time so they know that they are valued by the service.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Most foster carers said that they had always received their payments. One carer said they hadn't but it had been sorted out. If they did have any problems they would contact their support worker. There are policies and procedures available to staff and carers in respect of fostering allowances and payments to carers.

# Management

## The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

## **JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

5,17,21,22 ,24 and 32.

The agency is well managed and provides effective support to its carers through the provision of staff who are experienced and competent.

Each child has an individual record of their care and life events so they can look at it if they need to.



## **EVIDENCE:**

The carers had positive things to say about the service. They commented positively during the group and individual interviews. They said that the staff "do a good job" and that it is a "happy caring service, they treat as a friend and they listen to you". Another carer said that they thought staff were overworked "but very chirpy" another said that the supervising social worker and the child's social worker were "brilliant". Others commented that they felt it was a good service but they had not had support when their worker had been on holiday or on the sick.

Carers said that they found the out of hours service good, two carers said that they did not know there was an out of hours service.

Records maintained by the service were generally well ordered and accessible. The 'Foster Placement Agreement' had been updated and now includes all the matters detailed in Schedule 6 of the Regulations but it was noted that most of the carer's files still had the old version.

Each child has an individual record. Some of the records need to be more easy to read and have the date on so staff know if they are accurate and foster carers know how to meet the children's needs.

Arrangements were in place to monitor the Fostering Service and the quality of its performance.

The Local Authorities 'Monitoring and Review Team' are now carrying out foster carers reviews. This is too make sure that in the future they take place when they should. Some had not been carried out every year as required but the manager said they should catch up in the near future.

Staff said that they know what they are responsible for and the procedures they need to follow. The manager said that they do not have a worker to deputise for them when they are not at work however there are plans for a deputy to be appointed in the future.

Staff said that the administrative staff are very helpful and they are good at their work.

Some carers were not getting visits from their supervising social workers when they should. One carer said and records showed that they had not been visited for about 8months. They should have been visited every three months. Some carers said that if their social worker left, or was on sick leave, they did not receive regular visits by a supervising social worker. They also referred to difficulties in contacting a duty social worker because they were only available during the afternoon. The role of the supervising social worker appeared to be clear to both the social work staff and the carers.

Records showed that there were delays in allocating and completing assessments for family and friends carers. The manager said that there had been an increase in referrals for family and friends assessments some of which had been directed by the Court. This has resulted in staff having to prioritise their work. This matter is being reviewed by managers to try and find a solution.

# 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>	3

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

<b>ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>13</b>	2
<b>31</b>	X

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

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

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

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	FS9	17	Foster Carer's must have Child protection training so they know how to keep children in their care safe.	01/08/06
2	FS22	35(1) (ii)  28	Supervising social workers must visit foster carers at least every 3 months.  All foster carers must be in receipt of a foster carer agreement, which meets the requirements of Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.	01/05/06
3	FS32	38	Ensure compliance with Regulation 38 of the fostering Services Regulations 2002 and in the Fostering Services own procedures in respect of the assessment and approval of relatives and friends as carers. (Timescale of the 30/6/05 not met).	01/08/06

## **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	13	Consider putting systems in place to monitor and collate information about the attendance and educational achievement of children in foster care.
2	24	Ensure that written recordings in children's files are clearly written and easy to read.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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