



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**North Yorkshire County Council Fostering
Service**

**County Hall
Racecourse Lane
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL7 8DD**

Lead Inspector
David Martin

Announced Inspection
13th February 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service North Yorkshire County Council Fostering Service

Address County Hall
Racecourse Lane
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL7 8DD

Telephone number 01609 780780

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) North Yorkshire County Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Post Vacant

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

None

Date of last inspection 10th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

North Yorkshire County Council provides fostering services through the Children and Families Business Unit of the Social Services Department. There are three teams that are responsible for the recruitment, approval, support for and monitoring of foster carers. Each team is managed by a Service Manager who in turn is accountable to the Group Manager. The services provided include respite care, permanent foster care, family and friend foster care, specialist foster care and treatment fostering. There are three foster panels for the county that relate to the geographical areas of the three teams covering Scarborough/Ryedale, Hambleton/Richmond/Selby and Harrogate/Craven.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out over a period of three weeks, commencing officially on 13 February 2006. This inspection concerned itself with the way in which the service is delivered in the Harrogate/Craven area of the county. It was announced and was completed by a team of two inspectors. There were opportunities to talk with the young people placed within the service and a full range of carers. There were separate interviews with key staff members and the Chair of the Harrogate/Craven foster panel. A sample of records of children's case files and foster carers' file was inspected. A check was made as to whether the service had complied with the recommendations and requirements made in the last inspection report. Feedback was given at the end of the inspection to the Head of the service, one Fostering Service Manager and one General Manager.

What the service does well:

North Yorkshire Fostering Service has been very successful in recruiting new carers and as a result is able to offer a wide range of placements and matches. The majority of placements are planned. Carers are pleased with the assessment process and one described it as 'superb'. The files for the children and foster carers were maintained in good order. The Fostering Social Workers are committed and enthusiastic about their work and are happy with the quality of supervision and support.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has responded to recommendations in the last inspection report concerning improvements to office and the IT. System. The service has recognised that placements should be made as close to a child's community as possible to ensure good social work support. This is an area where further work is being undertaken. The recent creation of an 'access to resources panel' should enable the authority to have a better overall view of placements in both fostering and residential care. The panel is in its infancy and is being developed.

What they could do better:

The Fostering Service plans to enable prospective carers to attend panel. This will improve the assessment process. The personnel files for staff need to be kept in good order and should contain confirmation of Criminal Record Bureau Clearance. Individual risk assessments regarding children's activities should be completed promptly. Foster carers should be enabled to attend training to assist in their development as 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 or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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

The fostering service promotes the health and development.

EVIDENCE:

Inspection of the children's files provided evidence that Looked After Children (LAC) documentation has been completed and included information regarding children's health care needs. Medicals are undertaken as required. Carers confirmed that the children placed with them are registered with a GP and receive dental care. CAMHS provide specialist support to the fostering team and to individual carers regarding mental health and behavioural issues. The Looked After Children's Nurse is very positive about her role and the level of support that she can offer. Carers confirmed that their training addresses the health care needs of children. Health issues are taken into consideration in the matching process as appropriate. North Yorkshire Social Services have contracted out the service for specialist foster placements for children with a disability.

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

There are systems in place to ensure that children placed within the service are safe and protected from abuse.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering social work staff in post are suitably qualified and, as a group, have a wide range of social work experience. The managers are also suitably qualified and experienced. Evidence for this was contained on staff files and was confirmed through discussion. Staff personnel files provided evidence that staff have been subject to vetting. However, the staff files were not in an orderly state and recent changes in procedures has resulted in the removal of confirmation that CRB clearance has been obtained.

The recruitment and assessment of foster carers is thorough and approval decisions are made by the panel only after appropriate scrutiny. Observation of the panel provided evidence of this. It considered a wide range of issues and the level of discussion showed that the panel had a good understanding of the issues relating to the placement of Looked After Children in all fostering settings. The Panel Chair is satisfied with the quality of Form F assessments submitted to the Harrogate /Craven panel. Final approval of panel recommendations is made by the Agency decision maker. At present, prospective foster carers do not attend panel but this practice is due to be

changed. There are training events planned for panel members and the foster teams to enable this to happen in June 2006. Some foster carers said that it took a long time for their approval to come through following their initial enquiry, but the evidence would suggest this is the exception rather than the rule. One carer said the process was 'superb'.

The County has created a Resources Panel to assist in the process of securing the right type of placements for all children who are unable to live with birth families. The panel is in its infancy and has yet to clarify its role and function and the cases it will consider. The recent appointment of a placement manager should assist in this process.

One member of the administrative team has a record of all children requiring placements across the county and plays a key role in the initial matching stage. She attends the Harrogate/Craven team meeting and shares key information about the availability of placements but does not attend those of the two other teams. This was raised during feedback and it was agreed that it may be more appropriate for her to attend Child Placement Unit meetings.

There are procedures in place for safeguarding children from abuse and appropriate training is available to the foster carers. They foster carers were clear about the arrangements for reporting any concerns and understood the rules relating to the management of confidential information. Papers relating to child protection concerns arising in the last 12 months indicate an appropriate level of investigation and subsequent action.

The Fostering Service has been very successful in recruiting foster carers in the last 12 months and, as a result, is able to offer a wide variety of placements and successful matches. As far as possible all placements are planned and it is 'very rare' that a child is ever placed in an emergency.

All those foster homes visited during the inspection offered welcoming, clean and comfortable environments for children and young people with adequate space for privacy and personal belongings. All homes have been subject to an initial health and safety check by the fostering service.

One carer raised concerns about the length of time it took to agree a risk assessment for a child in her care.

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 & 31

The fostering service has a good awareness of children's individual needs and is effective in promoting their educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service promotes diversity and anti-discriminatory practice. There are specific equality courses for new foster carers. The subject is discussed during the assessment and preparation stage and this is reflected in the Form F Assessment. The population of North Yorkshire is predominantly White/British and this is reflected the foster carer and Looked After Children population.

The fostering service is committed to Looked After Children's educational attainment. Where possible children are placed in their local community to minimise any disruption to schooling. Where this is not possible or where a child is not attending school when they enter foster care, it is aimed to return the child to education within 20 days. Case records examined as part of the inspection provided evidence that Personal Education Plans are completed. The foster service has access to an Educational Liaison Manager and Education Personal Advisors who are able to support individual children and foster carers where there are problems. The introduction of this scheme has been very successful.

Short-term breaks are not provided by North Yorkshire fostering service.

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

The young people are consulted and involved in decisions about their care and contact is promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The County Council has procedures relating to its duties to promote contact between children and parents as appropriate in light of any safety concerns. There are arrangements in place for contact to be supervised as necessary. The foster carers have a good understanding of the need for children to maintain contact with their birth families and enable this to take place as necessary via telephone and contact visits. One carer reported difficulties in the contact for the children in her care. She said that repeated attempts to resolve the issues had failed and that she felt as if she was being ignored by the children's social worker. This matter was included in the feedback.

The children confirmed that contact arrangements are in place. There are regular Looked After Children reviews and the young people confirmed that they have attended or have been asked for their views. There are other forums for the children to express their views, the most notable being the Young People's Participation Group. One of the inspectors attended a meeting of this group and noted it to be well run. The young people have a positive view of the work of the group.

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)

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

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

14 & 29

The payment of fees is well organised

EVIDENCE:

On the whole, foster carers are pleased with the payment of fees and allowances and said that they are always paid promptly. There were one or two concerns raised about the late payment of allowances but this is not reflected generally across the service. Fees and allowances are paid above the level recommended by the Fostering Network.

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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 21 & 24

The fostering service is well-managed.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering team has an adequate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to undertake the work that it is required to do. The fostering social workers confirmed that they receive supervision and are happy with the quality of it. There are regular team meetings, one of which was observed by one of the inspectors. The meeting covered a range of topics and was well-organised. There is a high level of training available for staff some of which was described as 'very good'. The level of training has improved over the last two years and is all relevant to the work of the fostering team. The fostering social workers suggested that they would like to meet up with colleagues from the other two team up to 3 times per year to share experience and identify other areas for personal development. They said that this had met with some resistance from their managers. The issue was raised during the inspection feedback session.

Foster carers are provided with a range of opportunities to attend support groups and training. However, many expressed an unwillingness to attend training courses in particular, citing travel, location and the time of courses as obstacles. There are clearly some carers who have less interest in their ongoing development and others who are not being used to their full potential.

Some carers were concerned about the lack of contact they had with the children's social workers. The issues included them being late for meetings, cancelling appointments and not coming to reviews.

Most carers were very pleased with the support they received from their linkworkers and said that everybody within the team was approachable and helpful. One concern was raised about part-time link workers not always being available but there is no evidence to suggest this is a common problem. The foster carer's handbook is being revised and this should provide a good opportunity to talk to carers about its content.

A sample of children's case records was inspected. The files were in good order and contained all appropriate documentation relating to Looked After Children.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

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	FS3	Staff records should be maintained in good order and contain evidence that CRB clearance has been obtained.
2	FS6	Where necessary risk assessments concerning individual children should be completed promptly.
2	FS21	Foster carers should be enabled to attend training and continue their personal development.

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