



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Agency

**Civic Offices
PO Box 140
New Road
Grays Thurrock
Essex
RM17 6TJ**

Lead Inspector
Jacqueline Graves

Announced Inspection
20th February, 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

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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	Thurrock Fostering Agency
Address	Civic Offices PO Box 140 New Road Grays Thurrock Essex RM17 6TJ
Telephone number	01375 652419
Fax number	01375 652762
Email address	dkeens@thurrock.gov.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Thurrock Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Dianne Keens
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 31st January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service is funded and managed by Thurrock Council. The service is a significant aspect of the provision offered for looked after children.

The office is based in The Civic Centre in Grays. There is parking nearby and rail and bus links. The office space is shared with adoption and shared care staff.

Administration staff support the fostering team.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection started on 24th January, 2006 when the inspector attended and observed a panel meeting and interviewed the Panel Chair. The inspection was concluded on 20th March, 2006.

The key inspection standards were assessed during the inspection. These are the National Minimum Standards that must be inspected each year for fostering services. These are the standards that relate to the rights, welfare, health, safety and protection of children and young people.

The inspector case tracked the care of children and the support of carers by visiting three foster families. She met with staff and the manager and examined some records. Pre-inspection information was supplied by Thurrock to assist the inspection process.

Questionnaires were sent to forty foster carers and any children they foster over the age of eight. Replies were received from six carers and nine young people. Information from questionnaires is incorporated into this report.

The inspector would like to thank the manager and staff for their assistance with the inspection. She would also like to thank those carers and young people, who she visited, for their time and for giving their views on the service.

What the service does well:

The service is well led and managed. It is forward looking and aims for improvement in all areas. Staff and carers appreciate the good communication skills and professionalism of the manager.

Those carers visited, were child focussed and committed to the care of their foster children.

There has been increased investment in the service, with new supervising social worker posts and agreement for additional resources for the assessment of new carers.

In questionnaires, carers described the best things about the agency:

'Managers are very on the ball and accessible.'

'Lots of training opportunities. Professional staff.'

'Support.'

'A really good link worker, the emergency duty team, the social worker is always prompt to reply/contact me.'

'Easy access on the phone - helpful staff.'

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has responded positively to the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection.

The service has received extra financial investment.

At the last inspection, staff were very stretched to cover their work. Further staff have been recruited from overseas and new posts have been created. There was one vacancy at the time of inspection.

A new fee paid scheme has been introduced so that allowances are competitive and clearer for carers to understand.

What they could do better:

Further carers are needed; there continues to be a shortfall in placements for looked after children. It is unfortunate, that despite approving twelve new carers, a similar number have been lost through terminations and retirement. Additional resources have been allocated to increase the number of assessments carried out in the coming year.

Carers reported feeling well supported, with regular visits from their supervising social workers; it would further improve practice to make some of these visits unannounced.

The panel have attended some training this year. Some specific training to help panel members carry out their task would improve the panel's efficiency. Asking people, who have been presented to the panel, for their views, would help with the quality assurance of the agency.

In questionnaires, carers described the worst things about the agency:

'Staff changes.'

'Lack of social workers. Work loads seem to be too much.'

'The number of changes in social worker although not always avoidable due to ill health, etc.'

'Communication – lots of different professionals involved but quite often there are misunderstandings.'

'Not enough after school / holiday clubs for primary aged children. Too much movement of social workers.'

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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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

The health of children is promoted by the agency.

EVIDENCE:

Carers described ways in which they encourage the good health of their foster children, for example by taking them to hospital appointments and visits to medical professionals. Young people also described in questionnaires ways in which carers encourage their good health:

'I eat healthy food and I'm encouraged to play sport and not to sit in front of the play station or computer.'

'They cook me healthy food and give me lots of fruit, not lots of junk food and I brush my teeth and keep myself tidy.'

A nurse for looked after children carries out children's health assessments. The service can use a designated doctor who is a consultant paediatrician. Therapeutic services and a referral service are provided from the Oaktree Resource Centre.

Carers keep records of children's health including inoculations, health appointments, hospital treatment, and so on.

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 well managed and led. Improving the panel's effectiveness would ensure the quality of decisions.

EVIDENCE:

The manager of the service is very experienced and qualified to carry out the role. Carers praised her communication skills and felt she was approachable, listened and effected change when needed. Staff reported feeling well supported and able to approach the manager at any time.

Three staff recruitment files were checked. The staff members said their recruitment process had been thorough, with interviews and the requirement to show evidence of identity and qualifications.

The staff had been recruited via an agency from overseas; evidence of police checks in their countries of origin had been carried out for two of the staff by the recruiting agency rather than CRB checks in England. Human resources advised that CRB checks would be carried out after six months in this country.

References were addressed 'To whom it may concern' rather than to a specific person and there was no evidence of following these up with a telephone call, which is good practice. No files had a current photo.

Copies of qualifications and details of their experience showed that the staff are suitably qualified and experienced for the work they do.

A panel meeting was observed. The use of a checklist to ensure the quality of applications to foster was good practice. A new Panel Chair and Deputy Chair have been appointed since the last inspection.

The inspector felt that some questioning of the candidates was insensitive. It was also observed that not all members of the panel took part in discussion to reach a decision. Advising candidates of the questions panel members have raised, before the candidates are brought in front of them, may ease the difficult process of appearing in front of a panel.

Whilst the panel has undertaken some training this year on child protection, further training might benefit the panel members to help them understand their role and function. To contribute to Thurrock Fostering's overall quality assurance, and to the development of the panel, it might be beneficial to ask people who have been presented to panel for their opinions of what the process was like.

The Chair reported difficulties with maintaining a variety of roles/backgrounds amongst independent panel members, but advised that outside specialists have been used when necessary. The panel might benefit from having a member who has been fostered or whose child has been fostered.

Those carers and children visited, thought they had been well matched to each other. Thurrock does not have sufficient carers to provide a match to all the children needing a long-term placement but will use independent providers to make an appropriate match.

Carers spoken to were aware of the impact bullying can have on a young people and encouraged young people to talk about this and bring any bullying to their attention. Carers were knowledgeable about safe care.

Staff confirmed they had received child protection training. Complaints and the outcomes have been reported to CSCI.

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 service values diversity and promotes education. Further carers are needed for shared care.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was advised that diversity is explored in pre and post approval training for carers. Joint training with the Disabled Children Team was held on meeting the needs of children with disabilities. Three carers have been trained to care for children with complex health needs and considerable adaptations made to their homes to accommodate young people.

In questionnaires, children gave examples of how their individual interests had been encouraged by their foster carers:

'I go to drama and I'm in a play.'

Street dancing, basketball, music, play station, skateboarding, piano, keyboard and flute.'

'Get help by taking us there and coming to watch.'

A carer who was visited, emphasized how important it was for children to learn to socialise, so they can gain confidence and make friends at whatever stage of their lives. She assisted children to do this by taking them to social groups and inviting their friends to play.

Children wrote about the help they get from their carers with education:

'Helping me with homework and speaking to teachers often.'

They encourage me and they listen to me read and they encourage me to join clubs.'

Carers visited were good role models for promoting educational achievement; examples were given of employing a tutor to help a child catch up to their peers, of attending all school meetings, of encouraging the completion of homework and joining school clubs and of encouraging good attendance.

Providing care for children who have disabilities has been introduced into initial training. The service acknowledges that there are insufficient carers and more placements are needed to provide greater choice.

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

Thurrock promotes contact between children and their relatives wherever this is in the child's best interests.

EVIDENCE:

Contact is arranged at placement agreement meetings. The Oaktree Centre is seen as a good resource, providing a contact service, particularly for complex contact arrangements. In some cases, when appropriate, carers supervise contact themselves, sometimes in their own homes.

Those young people spoken to were aware of their contact arrangements and these were well supported by their carers. Arrangements were clearly recorded of children's files and children's opinions regarding contact were considered at reviews. Carers said issues surrounding contact are discussed during supervision.

In questionnaires, carers described how they help children remain in touch with their families and friends:

'Buy cards and gifts as appropriate.'

'They take things to show ...and things to do with (their relative).'

'Take them to contact. Entertain siblings in my own home.'

Some good examples of carers advocating on behalf of young people were given. Young people are given information on advocacy services. Children and birth families are consulted at reviews of their care and have opportunities to give their opinions on things, which matter to them, to independent reviewing officers prior to review meetings.

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):

29

The service pays allowances promptly.

EVIDENCE:

Fostering allowances were a low priority for those carers visited. All reported getting paid allowances promptly and being provided with any necessary equipment, for example for new babies.

A new payment structure has been developed which it is hoped will be clearer for carers to understand and fairer, with training linked to the new system of payments.

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

Comprehensive records of children's care are kept. The service has recruited from overseas to redress a shortage of qualified social workers.

EVIDENCE:

Due to the difficulties of recruiting locally, three social workers have been recruited from overseas. When interviewed, the new staff praised the

induction, training and support they had been given from the manager, staff team and the council to help them assimilate into their new role and lives. They found there was sufficient administrative support.

Carers reported finding difficulties relating to some of the differences in the cultural backgrounds and expectations of staff from abroad. An example given by a carer was discussed with the manager.

At the time of inspection, there were seven supervising social workers and all carers were allocated a supervising social worker. A comment from a carer questionnaire was:

'There is enough staff but there is a change frequently in some areas. This leads to confusion as you don't get used to who they are before they go.'

Supervisions take place monthly or less frequently if deemed appropriate, for example, for long term, stable placements.

In questionnaires, carers commented on the support available for carers:

'Prompt response most of the time.'

'Sorting of issues when child in hospital, letter of thanks for a job well done, etc.'

'Change of link worker can be difficult as it takes time to establish trusting relationships.'

Generally, carers thought the systems for out of hours support, assistance with contacting health and education agencies, and general communication with the service was good. Those carers visited praised the support they get from the Phoenix Carers' group and a mother and toddler group, the latter preventing awkward questions about the background of children.

Some children's case records were checked and found to be in good order with the required information, including consents for medical treatment.

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	4
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	2
30	2

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
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	3
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	3

NO

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	FS15	20 Sch. 1	Positive proof of identity including a recent photo must be on staff members files. That police checks from country of origin are held on file, where possible.	01/06/06

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	FS15	Telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references.
2	FS30	That consideration is given to advising people who are to appear before panel of the questions panel wishes to ask them before they enter the room. That one of the independent members is normally a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers. That consideration is given to asking people who have appeared before panel for their views on the process. That all panel members contribute to the functioning of the

		panel to ensure a rigorous process. That panel members are advised/offered training on how to treat applicants fairly.
3	FS31	Further carers need to be recruited to meet the needs of children and families.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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