

inspection report

Fostering Services

Vision Fostering Agency Ltd

Bridge House

High Street

Dartford

Kent

DA1 1DJ

18th May 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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

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

The role of CSCI is to:

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

Inspection Methods & Findings

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

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Vision Fostering Agency Ltd

Tel No

01322 629260/01322 629270

Address

Bridge House, High Street, Dartford, Kent, DA1 1DJ

Fax No

01322 629280

Email Address

enquiries@visiongroup.uk.com

Registered Number of IFA

H060000580

Name of Registered Provider

Vision

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Ms Ranjit Kang

Date of first registration

30th June 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

30th June 2003

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

16/04/03

Date of Inspection Visit		18th May 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	John Walker	126635
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

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Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

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Part D: Provider's Response

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The Mission of Vision Fostering Agency is to promote the growth of children and young adults while strengthening the family unit.

The agency's goal is to provide community based services to children and families for the purpose of strengthening the family unit, emancipating prepared, productive young adults and providing specialised, quality foster care. By meeting these needs in a caring, comprehensive and professional manner the agency aims to impact upon the quality of life for the children and families in their community.

Vision's point of focus always aims to be the child and it seeks to create a caring partnership clearly centred on individual children. Under the auspices of the 1989 Children's Act, and within the context of this partnership and co-operation between all those concerned and with the well-being of children placed with the agency, the agency intends to provide and uphold the highest standards of care to children and young people placed by it. Vision aims to offer a home to distressed and damaged children with a positive, safe and nurturing experience of substitute parental care.

Vision aims to develop an overall Fostering Service where there is respect for and recognition of the importance of the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language of children and young people, their families and foster carers.

(Taken from Vision Fostering Agency's Statement of Purpose – April 2004)

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

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

This was the second announced inspection of Vision Fostering Agency under the terms of the Care Standards Act 2000. Since the last inspection, held in April 2003, the agency had continued to grow and at the time of this inspection had just moved into premises which were currently undergoing refurbishment. In the previous inspection report the effective leadership and management of the agency, its ongoing work in supporting their carers and the children placed with them was commented upon very favourably. This inspection confirmed the agency was continuing to maintain high levels of good practice and the quality of its service had not been compromised as it grew. Indeed, in some areas the agency's practice had improved as a consequence of its development, particularly with regard to the improved caseloads of its supervising social workers.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was met.

The Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide were well produced documents but it was a good practice recommendation that the agency publishes its children's guide in other languages given that it places children from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

Both Standards were met.

The agency was very well led and managed under the leadership and vision of its registered provider. A new full-time manager had very recently been appointed to the agency and it is a requirement of this inspection that she completes the registration process as soon as possible.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

Both Standards were met.

This was a particular strength of the agency. It was evidenced the registered provider and manager had clear procedures in place for monitoring and controlling the activities of the agency and that the agency was managed effectively and efficiently.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

All 9 Standards assessed were met.

The agency had robust assessment and recruitment procedures in place to ensure that as far as possible only good quality carers were employed by the agency. The agency was particularly strong in providing carers from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and clearly valued diversity and promoted equality.

Recording, checking managing, supporting, and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

8 of the 9 Standards assessed were met.

The agency had robust staff recruitment procedures in place, though a minor shortfall was noted in that interview notes were not being kept. It was noted that the agency's foster care agreement did not comply fully with regulatory requirements and the agency has been asked address this matter. The agency had produced an excellent foster care handbook though no reference to the CSCI inspection process was contained within it. The agency provided its carers with a good quality rolling programme of training. Whilst the carers commented very favourably about the training it was their view that the training should be offered on different days which, in their view, would make attendance at training easier for them to achieve.

Records (Standard 24-25)

1 of the 2 Standards assessed was met.

The agency maintained all of its records to a very high standard though the inspector noted it had no formal policy in place on case recording. It was agreed this issue would be addressed by the agency.

Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service (Standard 26)

This Standard was met.

At the time of the inspection the agency had very recently moved premises into a large town house in its own grounds very close to the centre of Dartford. The house and outbuildings were being refurbished and once completed, it was the view of the inspector, the premises would be of a very high and fit for purpose.

Financial requirements (Standards 27-29)

All 3 Standards were met.

The agency had robust financial procedures in place.

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

This Standard was met.

This area was a particular strength of the agency. The agency had the benefit of a good quality Panel which undertook its role efficiently and effectively. The members of the Panel had a good depth and breadth of knowledge of and wide experience in foster care. Their observed practice was regarded as being of a very high standard.

Short-term breaks (Standard 31)

Not applicable.

Family and friends as carers (Standard 32)

Not applicable.

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

NO

NO

NO

NO

[illegible]

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

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

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector

John Walker

Signature

J Walker

Second Inspector

Signature

Locality Manager

Alison Spreadbridge

Signature

A. M Spreadbridge

Date

10/06/04

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	7	FS2	That the newly appointed manager completes the registration process.	As soon as possible.
2	34(3)	FS22	That the agency updates its foster care agreement to ensure it complies fully with Schedules 5 & 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations.	31/07/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	That the agency publishes its children's guide in other languages given that it places children from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
2	FS15	That the agency makes and keeps its interview notes when recruiting staff.
3	FS22	That the foster carers' handbook should include a reference to the CSCI inspection process.

4	FS23	That the agency considers the carers' request to vary the days and times on which their training is offered.
5	FS24	That the agency has a written policy on case recording.

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

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

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

Number of Inspector days spent	2.5
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	NO
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES

Date of Inspection	18/05/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	20

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Vision Fostering Agency presented a detailed and well-presented Statement of Purpose which fulfilled the regulatory requirements. The inspector was impressed with the way in which the agencies policies, guidelines and procedures and produced were clearly linked to the Statement. The agency had produced a children's handbook which was well written and easy to follow. It was a good practice recommendation that the agency might wish to publish the children's guide in other languages given that it places children from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was evident from the documentation provided and the outcome of the Fit Person Interview that the nominated provider had the relevant qualifications and experience to meet the Standards.

At the time of the inspection the agency had very recently appointed a full-time manager who was going through the registration process. Discussion with her indicated she had a breadth and depth of experience of children's services work and was appropriately qualified. However, it was accepted by her that she would have to evidence the required documentation and demonstrate her knowledge and expertise through the Fit Person Interview process in order to be fully registered. It was a recommendation in the previous inspection report that the agency should appoint a full-time manager and the inspector was pleased to note that the agency had achieved this.

Evidence obtained from interviews with staff and carers indicated that they felt the organisation was well managed and led, appropriately staffed and resourced.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

An examination of staff files indicated that this Standard was met. It was recommended in the previous inspection report that *Telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references and are duly logged*. Inspection of a number of staff references evidenced that the follow up telephone calls were made and with the details being logged on the references themselves.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Examination of relevant documentation and discussion with the registered provider indicated that there were clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the agency. For example, the registered provider regularly visited carers to ensure they were receiving the support and training they were entitled to and spoke with children in foster care and carers' birth children to ensure they themselves had no issues or concerns; visited local authorities who placed children with the agency to ensure they were satisfied with the work of the agency; had direct contact with all staff to discuss their practice and to pick up on any issues or concerns; met with the Panel chair on a regular basis and monitored all relevant documentation relating to complaints and incidents.

Discussion with staff and carers, and an examination of a number of staff files indicated there were clear roles for managers and staff and well-established lines of communication and of accountability between, managers, staff and carers.

Extensive and informative financial documentation was made available during the course of the inspection which clearly indicated the organisation had proper financial procedures in place and that the financial information provided to purchasers and others was readily available.

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

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

1

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4) The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Since the last inspection there had been a change of manager as indicated in the comments made regarding Standard 2. The new manager had a clear job description which set out her duties and responsibilities.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Discussions with staff and carers indicated Vision had a rigorous recruitment/selection process so as to ensure that as far as possible high quality foster carers were employed by the organisation. As part of the selection process the quality of the accommodation for use as a foster home was assessed by the agency's placement manager and two of the agency's supervising social workers. Once appointed foster carers received regular support and training in matters relating to Health & Safety, Child Protection, First Aid as well as other forms of training. Scrutiny of foster carers' files indicated foster homes were inspected annually as part of the carers' Annual Review. The responses made in the Young People's Questionnaires (23 responses) indicated the overwhelming majority of young people valued their placements, were very appreciative of the quality of support and care they received from their carers and appreciated the wide range of activities offered to them.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

It was a finding of the previous inspection the agency's practice in this area was excellent and discussion with carers and staff confirmed that this was still the case. The agency had continued to be successful in recruiting carers from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and was therefore well placed to meet the needs of a broad range of children in terms of their own ethnicity and culture. All staff and carers continued to receive regular training in valuing diversity. As an example of good practice the inspector was informed the agency enclosed religious books and resources (e.g. prayer mats) and linguistic dictionaries in the children's welcome pack for those children who needed access to such items. Supervising social workers and the project development manager helped and supported carers to access local community centres and groups and places of worship as appropriate. The inspector was impressed with the excellent work which was still being undertaken by the agency with regard to meeting this Standard.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

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

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

Vision had policies and procedures in place aimed at ensuring that each child/young person placed with them was carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs. Discussion with the placement manager evidenced that when a child was referred to the agency on an emergency basis an initial placement referral form was completed upon which as much current information about the child was recorded. Reference was then made to the agency's carers' vacancy list which gave detailed information about each carer in terms of their ethnicity, the areas in which they lived, their approval details and so on. If an appropriate match was found the relevant carer would be contacted and the child placed if all parties were agreeable. If a suitable match could not be found the agency would not place the child.

The placement manager informed the inspector the majority of placements made by the agency were on an emergency basis. However, on those occasions when planned placements were made, introductory meetings were held for the child to visit his/her prospective foster carers and to meet them in their home before moving on to placement.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

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

As a matter of policy Vision aimed to ensure that all carers were properly vetted and assessed before any child, was placed with them. Discussion with the carers confirmed the agency did have a thorough recruitment procedure. The Form F documentation was undertaken by independent social workers. Every carer subsequently employed by the agency was provided with safe care guidelines and was required to attend training in child protection. Regular fortnightly visits were made to the carers homes by their support workers and every member of staff, carer and child was given the telephone number of CSCI and the area authority in order for them to report any incidents of concern/abuse or harm.

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

97**%**

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Discussions with carers and young people and scrutiny of the respective questionnaires indicated Vision did make sure that each child or young person in foster care was encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts. Issues and problems relating to family contacts were discussed and worked through with carers by support workers. The discussion with the carers indicated they felt they were well advised and supported by Vision with regard to this area and recognised the importance for the majority of children to develop and maintain good contact with their own birth families.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Discussions with carers and young people and scrutiny of the respective questionnaires indicated that this Standard was met. At the time of the inspection the agency had recently made it an expectation of supervising social workers that during the course of their visits to foster homes they would spend some time alone with the foster children to ensure their placements were satisfactory. The agency had also recently introduced a pre-review LAC pro-forma so the child's views and opinions over issues which affected them would be raised at their LAC reviews. The agency also ensured that as far as possible each child was given feedback about the outcome of their review to ensure they understood and agreed its outcomes.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Vision had clear policies and extensive guidelines which indicated the responsibilities of all those involved in the health care of each child. Discussions with staff and carers and an examination of children's files indicated that the policies and guidelines were being followed.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

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

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

Vision had policies and guidelines in place aimed at promoting the education of each child. The majority of children placed with the agency attended their local mainstream or special schools. It was reported to the inspector that those children of compulsory school age who were not receiving regular education were mainly unaccompanied minors awaiting admission to local schools. However, the agency had established links with local colleges of further education who allowed young people under the age of 16 to attend ESL courses if they were not receiving full-time education. This was regarded as good practice by the inspector.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

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

Vision had clear policies and guidelines in place aimed at ensuring its young people were prepared for independent living. The agency provided relevant training for carers in this area. The carers opened savings/bank accounts for the young people in their care and were expected to involve them in budgeting, shopping, cooking and cleaning at levels appropriate to the young person's age and levels of understanding. The carers and supervising social workers worked with the young person's local authority in developing Pathway Plans.

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

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Vision had developed clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff, the use of which were confirmed in discussion with staff. An examination of a number of staff files evidenced the agency undertook CRB checks, had their references checked and were properly interviewed as part of the agency's selection procedure. Discussion with the registered provider indicated the agency was not keeping written interview notes. It was a good practice recommendation that such notes should be kept and put on file.

The agency used appropriately qualified independent social workers to undertake assessment work with regard to the recruitment and approval of foster carers.

Total number of staff of the agency:

12.4

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

3

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Discussions with staff indicated they felt themselves to be well organised and managed. The inspectors were told there was a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability and that they had clear job descriptions and received regular supervision and training. An examination of staff files supported what staff stated. The staff files were very well ordered and indexed documents that contained all relevant information. Discussion with support workers and carers and an examination of carers files indicated there were structures and systems in place to ensure assessments, approvals and reviews of carers were managed and implemented effectively. Discussions with staff and carers indicated there were good levels of administrative, clerical support and office equipment and were administrative procedures in place for dealing promptly with enquiries from prospective carers and any new request for services.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

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

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

At the time of the inspection the number of supervising social workers had increased to 7.4 FTE. This increase in social workers reflected the fact that the agency had continued to grow since the last inspection and the registered provider wished to ensure the agency had sufficient staff to support the carers and children. The staff files examined confirmed supervising social workers were appropriately qualified and regularly supervised by senior experienced social work staff. Discussion with staff indicated the agency was a good employer and offered all of its employees training, supervision, clear workloads and terms and conditions. Discussion with carers confirmed the agency was a good employer and provided them with regular support and training. As has already been mentioned previously in the report, the agency had been successful in recruiting a range of carers from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds which enabled it to offer appropriate placements to a broad range of children.

The agency had clear procedures in place for the recruitment of carers which met the regulatory requirements. The qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering were properly assessed by independent social workers. This was confirmed when a number of completed Form F's were examined and a Panel meeting observed by the inspector.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

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

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

Feedback during discussions with staff and carers demonstrated they regarded Vision as being a fair and competent employer. The carers commented very positively about the high levels of out of hours support they were given and the good quality support they generally received at other times. Examination of foster carers' files showed there were management systems in place for carer supervision, appraisal and support. Vision had a health and safety policy for carers, children and staff which covered all legal requirements. Copies of relevant insurance policies were presented. Further discussions with staff and carers indicated that the Vision whistleblowing policy was made known to all employees.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

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

Vision offered all of its carers a rolling programme of training which they were required to attend. The inspector observed one carers training session the theme of which was 'Working with Unaccompanied Minors'. 18 carers were in attendance. The session was led by a suitably qualified and experienced trainer who talked to the group about issues relating to the legislation, care and other matters to be aware of when fostering children who were unaccompanied minors. The session was well presented and relevant to the needs of the group.

Discussion with the registered provider indicated he always used appropriately qualified and

experienced speakers to lead the agency's training sessions. Discussion with carers confirmed the agency offered them a good quality training programme which had recently covered topics such as First Aid training, Safe Caring, Working in Partnership, Disability Awareness, Drug & Alcohol Abuse.

Discussion with staff indicated they also received regular training appropriate to their needs. Individual members of staff were sponsored by the agency to obtain social work qualifications and general training was also offered on a regular basis. Recent topics had included the Fostering Regulations, Agency Procedures and Form F Procedures.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was a recommendation in the previous inspection report *That action points are made at the end of staff supervision notes which should provide the agenda for the next supervision session*. Discussion with staff and an examination of a number of supervision notes indicated the agency had clearly addressed the issue. Supervising social workers received fortnightly supervision and administrative staff monthly. Supervision notes were typed up and points raised in the previous meeting were discussed and at the end of the meeting an agenda was agreed for the next. The supervision notes were fed into the agency's annual appraisal system during the course of which each employee was required to complete their own appraisal form. Comments were added to it by the employee's line manager which were then discussed at an appraisal interview. At the end of the interview training, development and other targets were set and progress on them monitored during supervision sessions.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was a recommendation in the previous inspection report *That the agency continues to review its levels of social work support staff so as to ensure that the workload of existing supervising social workers might be reduced*. It has already been mentioned in this report the agency had increased the number of its supervising social workers since the last inspection. The registered provider informed the inspector the caseload for each supervising social worker had reduced from 20 to 12 and it was planning to reduce this ratio even more by recruiting two assistant social workers. The agency had clearly implemented the previous inspection's recommendation.

The agency had clear guidelines and procedures in place for working with carers which were understood by all agency staff spoken to by the inspector.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

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

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

Discussions with carers and staff, examination of a number of foster carer files indicated that this Standard was largely met. The evidence seen suggested that every foster carer received regular support by a named, appropriately qualified social worker; supervision meetings were properly minuted and issues followed up appropriately. Significant Events were being properly recorded. The Foster Carers' Handbook contained well-presented policies, procedures and guidance, legal information and insurance details. Systems of practical support, the procedures for dealing with complaints and information about the procedures to deal with investigations into allegations were made explicit in the handbook. It was noted by the inspector no reference was made in the handbook regarding the CSCI inspection process and a good practice recommendation was made that the handbook should make reference to it. A minor shortfall was noticed by the inspector with regard to the agency's foster care agreement in that it did not address all the matters indicated in Schedules 5 & 6 of the Fostering Regulations. It was recommended that the agency updated its foster care agreement to ensure it complied fully with the Schedule.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

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

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

Discussion with the Manager indicated Vision provided pre-approval and induction training for each carer which included opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers and that all new foster carers received induction training. It was the expectation of the agency that carers had to attend the training offered and were encouraged to undertake appropriate GNVQ courses. Discussion with carers confirmed this was the case. They also stated that their own particular training needs were discussed with their support workers and the agency was responsive to them. An examination of carers' files indicated that each carer's Annual Review included an appraisal of training and development needs which were documented in the carers' review reports. Discussion with the carers indicated the only concern they had about the training offered by the agency was that it always took place on a Saturday. The carers felt it would be better if the timing of training sessions could be varied.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

An examination of children's case records showed them to be very well ordered and informative documents which contained much information about each child. As was mentioned previously in this report the agency had recently introduced a pre- LAC review form to ensure the child's views were known at the review and, additionally, to ensure also the child understood the basis for his/her current placement, intended duration and purpose. The carers were required to undertake life story work with the children in their care.

A minor shortfall was noted in that the agency did not have a written policy on case recording.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

It was the view of the inspector Vision maintained its administrative records to a very high standard. All files were properly indexed and well ordered. Separate records were kept and all confidential records were stored securely and systems in place to ensure access to them were restricted to the appropriate members of staff. Evidence seen indicated that Vision had extensive systems in place for the recording of allegations and complaints and their outcomes, and that separate records were maintained which brought together data in these areas.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	104
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Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	63
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Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	75
--	----

Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	72
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Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	3
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Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	317	Maximum £	460
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Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

At the time of the inspection the agency had recently moved premises to a large town house close to Dartford town centre. The registered provider had redecorated much of the property and all staff had either their own offices or larger office areas they were able to share with their colleagues. Additionally, there was a large garden to the rear of the property which contained a building which had previously housed a number of offices. At the time of the inspection these were being completely refurbished in order to provide the agency with additional training and lecture rooms and a fully equipped staff kitchen. Once completed it was the inspector's view the agency would be able to offer its staff and carers first class training and meeting facilities.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Discussion with the registered provider indicated the agency was financially viable. The agency had no overdrafts with any bank and held a very substantial amount of money in reserve.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Discussion with the registered provider indicated this Standard was met. The company was required to produce properly audited accounts on an annual basis. The registered provider had a three-year development plan in place.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

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

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

Discussions with carers and an examination of a number of carers' files indicated that this Standard was met.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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The inspector observed one Panel meeting. There were 9 Panel members present 4 of whom were independent members. The Panel was well chaired throughout. In the session observed by the inspector three independent social workers were presenting their assessments of prospective carers to the Panel. It was clear from the documentation presented and what was stated by the presenting social workers the agency had robust recruitment procedures in place its carers (as has been commented elsewhere within the report). The questions raised and the quality of discussion made by Panel members was entirely appropriate. In the inspector's view the Panel members were a cohesive group who were very much aware of the importance and value of their role. Discussion with Panel members indicated they had access to medical expertise as required and received management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews

Examination of documentation indicated Panel members were properly checked and were not allowed to begin work until all checks were satisfactorily completed Panel meetings were properly minuted.

It was the view of the inspector the agency's Panel was very effective the members of which undertook their duties in an exemplary manner.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
Not applicable.	9

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
Not applicable.	9

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D

PROVIDER'S RESPONSE

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

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 18th May 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Comments were received from the Provider a copy of which are available from the Maidstone Area Office Tel: 01622 724950.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 8 July 2004 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

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

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I Amarjit Dhull of Vision Fostering Agency confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I Amarjit Dhull of Vision Fostering am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

--

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

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

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S0000038134.V148086.R02

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