



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Merton Fostering Services

Worsfield House

Church Road

Mitcham

Surrey

CR4 3BE

5th,6th,8th & 23rd January 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?

YES

Name of Authority

Merton Fostering Services

Address

Worsfield House, Church Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4
3BE

Local Authority Manager

Dawn Greenidge

Tel No:

020 8545 4220

Address

Worsfield House, Church Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4
3BE

Fax No:

020 8545 4203

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NA

Date of last inspection

10/3/03

Date of Inspection Visit		5th January 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jean Stuart	071704
Name of Inspector	2	Davina Mclaverty	071703
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. 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		Dawn Greenridge	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 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**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of Merton Fostering Services. 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 NCSC 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.

Merton Fostering Service is a local authority service that provides temporary and permanent foster carers for children and young people.

The service is based in Worsfold House, Mitcham, Surrey.

The day to day management of the service is left to the Fostering Manager. The types of services offered are: (a) Short term Foster Care, (b) Short Breaks Scheme.

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 inspection took two Inspectors over three days in January, a further day (part of) was required to observe the Panel. The Inspection demonstrated that the majority of standards had been met. Overall the quality of the service provided was good. Comment cards have been received from one placing Officer, nine foster carers and eight young people. Comments show satisfaction with the service.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1).1 Standard had a minor shortfall.

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose is available. A Children's' Guide is circulated to all children and foster carers. The Children's' Guide should be produced in different formats, to ensure the differing needs of children are met.

Fitness to carry on or to Manage a Fostering Service (Standard 2-3). 2 Standards were met.

From the feedback, observation and information received the Inspectors concluded that the operation of the service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care. Staff files contain the required details.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5) 1 Standard was met. 1 Standard had a minor shortfall.

The fostering Manager and her staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. In line with good practice the Fostering Service is reminded of the need to notify the NCSC of any events listed under Schedule 8.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14) 8 Standards were met, 1 Standard had a minor shortfall.

Before foster carers are approved they attend various training courses, are interviewed, references taken and various checks carried out. The files viewed by inspectors and attendance at a staff meeting demonstrated that children are adequately matched with foster carers, and encouraged to maintain their cultural beliefs. Foster children are asked for feedback in writing before their reviews. On a visit to a foster home, a foster carer expressed concern that information reached her after the placement had commenced. Further steps must be taken to ensure the children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, and Training staff and Foster Carers. (Standards 15-23) 9 Standards were met.

All foster carers and staff undergo a check with the criminal records bureau. Social workers

have an allocated case load. Supervision takes place with line managers on a four to six weekly basis. Foster carers reported that they feel well supported. All foster carers sign a carer's agreement.

Records (Standards 24-25) 2 Standards are met

The foster service maintains a case record for each foster child, and each foster carer. Records are stored securely.

Fitness of premises for use as Fostering Services (Standard 26) 1 Standard was met.

The office accommodation is adequate.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29) 3 Standards were examined 3 Standards were met.

This is a local authority service and is financed on a regular basis by the financial department of the council. Foster carers reported that they receive payments on time.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30) 1 Standard was met.

The Fostering Panels meet on a monthly basis. The Panels were child centred and focused on outcomes for children.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31) 1 Standard was met.

Policies and procedures are in place for short term care. To aid the development of the service a designated Social worker is to be employed.

Family and Friends as Carers (32) 1 Standard was met.

The council has a number of family and friends approved as carers this is now the responsibility of the Permanency Team Manager.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

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

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

YES

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Regulation 3(2)(c) Standard 1: The fostering service must ensure all children have a Children's Guide available to them.

Regulation 12(2)(f) Standard 9: The fostering service must ensure that the children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.

Regulation 17(3) Standard 12: The fostering service must ensure that information about the child is available to carers.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

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	
4	12(2f)	11and 22	That the fostering service informs all children in the fostering care of the telephone numbers and address of the National Care Standards Commission office to enable them to raise any concerns that they may have.	30.5.03

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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 Jean Stuart **Signature** _____
Second Inspector _____ **Signature** _____
Locality Manager Norma Vieira **Signature** _____
Date _____

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 and recommendations 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	3(2)(c)	1	The Fostering service must ensure all children have a Children's Guide available to them.	31.4.04
2	12(2)(f)	9	Further steps must be taken to ensure the children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.	31.4.04
3	17(3)	12	To ensure that adequate care is delivered information about the foster child must be available to carers.	31.4.04

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	1	The Children's Guide should be produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.
2	4	The Management team were reminded of the need to follow good practice, and notify the NCSC of any events listed under Regulation 43(1) Schedule 8.

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

Number of Inspector days spent	6
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	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	NO
Date of Inspection	5/1/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	50

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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?

2

A comprehensive Statement of Purpose specifically for Fostering Service has been produced,(December 2003) and has been circulated to all staff and foster carers. This document includes the aims of the service, services provided to children, standards of care, staff details, recruitment, selection, training and support of foster carers. A Children's Guide has been written and the Manager reported is being circulated to all children and foster carers in the fostering section. Eight questionnaires were received back from children, three of the children reported that they had not been given a children's guide or a leaflet about the service. The Fostering service must ensure all children have a guide available to them. The service is looking at ways to ensure that the Guide is produced in formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.

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
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Since the previous inspection the management of the service has changed. The Manager has returned to her substantive post in June 2003. The completed pre-inspection questionnaire indicates that the Fostering Manager has a professional qualification together with management experience in fostering. In interview the Manager demonstrated that she exercises good leadership of the staff. From the feedback, observation and information received the Inspectors concluded that the operation of the service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care.

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
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Four staff files were examined during the course of this inspection. These files contained application forms together with full employment history, satisfactory explanation of any gaps in employment, relevant qualifications, references and Criminal record Bureau checks (CRB).

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?

2

The Fostering Manager and her staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Staff are able to access support through well-established lines of communication and regular group team meetings and supervision. For the foster carers there is a support group and individual supervision to enhance communication. The Fostering Service run a telephone advice line, which is staffed mainly, but not exclusively by Supervising Social Workers: some Social Workers from the field social work teams are also on the rota. The service runs from 6pm – 1am Monday to Friday, and 10am – 1am weekends and bank holidays. Each of the persons involved in the fostering service has a duty to declare any possible conflicts of interest to the organisation. This is a Local Authority run service and the Audit Section monitors the finances. The Fostering Manager holds a small budget and this is reviewed regularly to ensure that he remains within the allocated resources.

The Management team were reminded of the need to follow good practice, and notify the NCSC of any events listed under Regulation 43(1) Schedule 8.

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

NO

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

NO

Serious illness or accident of a child.

NO

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

NO

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

YES

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

NO

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

YES

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

YES

Number of complaints made to NCSC 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**

The Fostering Manager is employed on a full- time basis. The Manager has the responsibilities of the day to day function of the fostering services. The Manager informed the Inspectors that she has a job description which clearly sets out her roles and responsibilities and that he is aware of his lines of accountability. Her Line Manager and a designated staff member support the Manager in her absence. Following discussions with the Manager, staff group, foster carers and feedback received from the questionnaires, the Inspectors concluded that this service is being managed to a good standard.

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
<p>Four carers' files were sampled. The files indicate that before foster carers are approved they attend various trainings courses, are interviewed, references taken and various checks made. The Inspectors could see that part of the assessment for foster carer's approval included the environment. This is to ensure that the house is safe and that the furniture and fittings, meet with the London Borough of Merton requirements. Four foster carers were visited and interviewed during the course of this inspection. The foster carers confirmed that they have a copy of the Foster Carers Handbook. Foster carers reported that a periodic review of each foster carer is completed and that they have regular visits from the supervising social Worker.</p>		

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?	3
<p>The fostering service addresses the issues of diversity and promoting equality by organising group discussions, training and in supervision. This is also promoted through the Foster Carer Handbook. Foster children are encouraged to maintain their cultural beliefs and attend functions as necessary. There are a few foster carers on the register who provide specialist services e.g. children who have disabilities etc. The Inspectors were told that there were rolling programmes to recruit foster carers who will take children with disabilities and siblings and from minority ethnic background.</p>		

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
Attempts are made at all times to ensure that each child placed is carefully matched with a carer who is capable of meeting the assessed needs of the child. The Manager reported that this becomes an issue when there is an emergency and also because of very few specialist foster carers available. In these circumstances the child is placed with as near a matching carer and a more suitable placement searched for as soon as possible. This issue is regularly discussed in supervision and meetings in order to find a solution.		

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?	2
<p>There is a department guidance, which has been given to all Foster Carers, which clearly sets out how to protect children from abuse and what to do in case there was abuse. Each child has access to their Social Workers to discuss any concerns they may have. There is an advocacy service for Local Authority Children commissioned by the Department. This officer arranges forums and activities to discuss relevant issues specific to the children's needs. The children are encouraged to attend their statutory reviews and provide a confidential written contribution. The London Borough of Merton Fostering Service provides training on the above issues, One foster carer reported that she had "done training on abuse". Staff reported that this is also the subject of discussions between the Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers on their home visits.</p> <p>Eight children returned questionnaires. Two children reported that they had not been told how to make a complaint, six that they did. Seven children stated that they did not know how to get in touch with the National Care Standards; three that they had not been given a Children's Guide or leaflet telling them about the fostering service. Overall this indicates that further steps must be taken to ensure the children have adequate knowledge about how to make a complaint.</p> <p>The question on bullying is no longer on the Children's questionnaire.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:		0

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

Depending on circumstances of the child, contacts are maintained with their birth parents and supervised visits if necessary are arranged. The carers reported that Social Workers are at hand to provide support and assistance in dealing with any contact issues. The files show that each contact is recorded in detail. The foster carers reported to the Inspector that maintaining contacts is crucial to the upbringing of the child, and one foster carer reported that there was "regular contact with the family".

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

Feedback from the children questionnaires revealed that children's opinions are sought and listened to. The children seen during the inspection appeared comfortable in their environment, and their manner indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster carer. The Children's Handbook details that children can also make complaints to the National Care Standards Commission.

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?**

2

All foster carers are given full information including the health needs about the child being placed, except in an emergency when two carers reported to the Inspectors that information is delayed, however it is made available as soon as possible. There is a Looked After Children Health Worker in post who ensures that children, foster parents and Social Workers have the necessary information they need to keep the children healthy. One foster carer reported that information on the special medical needs of the child was given after respite care had started. The "information was too late". To ensure that adequate care is delivered information must be available to carers.

It can be seen on files that arrangements are made by the foster carers to have their own GP's accessible to the foster children as and when this becomes necessary. One carer spoke to the Inspector of planned trips to the dentist for the foster child.

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
Four children's files examined during the course of this inspection indicated that children of school age all have some links with schools. The foster carers reported to the Inspectors that they have the responsibilities to ensure that children do attend school, any child away from school or absent is entered in their logbooks and Social Workers are notified. Meetings concerning school are discussed at the children's review. The Manager of the Chances Team in discussion with the Inspector reported how she actively works on preventing exclusion from school, and returning the child to school.		

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
A Social Worker reported that each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living is consulted at an earlier stage about his/her future and encouraged to be actively involved in decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan. The foster carers involved are also expected to provide support and guidance to the young person preparing to move. There is a dedicated '16+ Team' that provides input to Looked After Children and foster carers. There is also training available to foster carers on 'Preparation for Adult Life'. The Corporate Parenting Strategy ensures that children and young people are involved with projects for example, meeting the Major, and the Teenagers to Work Scheme.		

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

The files show there is a recruitment strategy in place to recruit foster carers. All foster carers are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references taken up and checked to assess suitability. Records are kept of references that have been obtained and their outcomes. All Social Worker staff have an appropriate qualification to work with children and most of them have three or more years experience in this field. All foster carers and staff undergo the Criminal Records Bureau checks. All personnel involved in fostering service are supported with group meetings, supervisions and trainings. The foster carers are being encouraged to follow the NVQ level 3 courses.

Total number of staff of the agency:

10

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

0

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

This is a Local Authority run service with a management structure, which has lines of accountability. The Manager reported that Social Workers have allocated caseloads and are supervised by their Line Managers on a 4 weekly basis. This was confirmed to Inspectors by Social Workers, there is a duty system in operation during office hours to answer any queries. One administrative staff supports the Fostering Service. Foster carers remain concerned that the child's social worker changes frequently, but no negative comments were received about communication between the child's Social Worker and the supervising Social Worker. The Manager reported that more joint working has now been set up to ensure that the child's Social Worker and the supervising Social Worker clearly understand each other's roles in order to work effectively together.

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
It was evident during the course of the staff group discussion that the staff have worked well together to achieve the targets set, i.e. review of the Handbook for foster carers, reviews of children, and home visits. The Fostering Service has a procedure for the recruitment of foster carers from all groups including ethnic backgrounds. The Fostering Service has a very clear assessment and approval process for foster carers.		

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
Information gathered following our discussion with staff and foster carers regarding employment indicated that the Local Authority is a fair and competent employer with sound employment practices. The Out of Hour's duty team is available to deal with emergencies that may arise. The Inspectors were told by the Fostering Manager that there is a Whistle blowing policy and this has been made available to staff and all foster carers. London Borough of Merton as a Local Authority organisation has a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children in their care and staff.		

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
The London Borough of Merton has a comprehensive training programme. A Training and Development Manager is in post to manage training of all staff and foster carers of the Children Division. The Inspectors were told that this organisation have joint training programme with the London Borough of Sutton and are looking to work with Croyden. Regular training courses are organised. Some are general courses i.e. health and safety, child abuse while others are specific i.e. Post Qualification, Supervision Training, Detachment, Challenging Behaviours etc. The Inspectors were informed that all new staff follow the Council induction programme.		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The staff said that they are aware of their duties and responsibilities expected of them. Meetings and supervisions for all staff are planned in advance. On examination of the four permanent staff files it was noted that staff receive appraisals from their line manager and a copy of this is kept in each person's personnel file. Feedback received from staff revealed that they have opportunities to discuss both business issues and team issues. A senior member of staff is always available to support and make decision if and when it becomes necessary.</p>		

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
<p>Feedback received from the foster carers revealed that that they are well supported by their supervising social workers. Entries are made of meetings, supervision, training and group discussions in the foster carers files. Four foster carers files were examined by the Inspectors and were found to be adequate.</p>		

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?	3
<p>Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, qualified Social Worker. As shown in the Handbook, foster carers have access to other professional support, information and advice. This is to enable the carer to provide consistent, high quality care for a child or young person placed in their home. The Inspectors noted that all foster carers signed an agreement. The Handbook sets out standards, policies and guidance of the fostering service. Information on how to make a complaint includes the address and telephone number of the local National Care Standards Commission office.</p>		

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

Foster carers reported that before foster carers are approved, each carer has an opportunity to talk to existing foster carers about their experience and knowledge; they spoke of attending required training and receiving induction training. There is an on-going programme of training and self-development for foster carers to develop their skills and tackle any weaknesses. Some foster carers spoken to say that they find it difficult to attend training because of other commitments, experienced foster carers would prefer specific training courses. One foster carer's questionnaire reflected the need for specialist training for respite carers. It was also noted that foster carers have completed the NVQ Level courses. Regular meetings are held with the staff to evaluate and review training needs of foster carers.

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?

3

The foster care service maintains a case record for each foster child or young person in his or her foster care. The foster carer keeps a record of events in the child's life. A foster carer who receives respite care reported that the book "passes between herself and the respite carer". A record is also maintained of foster carers. Entries are made of visits by social workers. Forms were found to be in good order. The inside of the front cover of the files details the contents of each section. The children's files examined at the time of inspection were found to be in a good organised manner.

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

The records examined during the course of this inspection were found to be in good order. Confidential records are kept securely and safely in locked cupboards and are accessible to authorised staff only. The building is controlled by security cameras and entry to the building is by the use of a key pad and a swipe card.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:	75
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:	105
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:	141
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:	12
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:	13
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	82.74
Maximum £	330.5

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

This is a Local Authority run service and the finance is audited on a regular basis by the finance department of the council.

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?
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This is a Local Authority run service and the finance is audited on a regular basis by the finance department of the council.

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?
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This is a Local Authority run service.
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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

The Foster Carer Handbook gives details about the charges and allowances paid by the fostering service. The charges are agreed at the beginning of each placement and reviewed annually or sooner if there is a need for it. All foster carers spoken with stated that they receive payments on time with details of breakdown of the costs of the services and for additional payments. The finance staff use a Merton Council spread sheet to keep track of payments.

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?	3
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The Fostering Panels meet on a monthly basis. Observation made of a Panel meeting indicated that they are operating within the terms of reference as agreed. It was noted that the Panels were child-centred and focused on outcomes for children. The Social Workers when presenting the case to the Panels ensured that the range of information is collated, including applicant's involvement in assessment. The Chair ensured that all members participated and that all relevant information was considered and that good quality decisions were made about the approval of foster carers.

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?
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London Borough of Merton has a "Short Breaks Scheme": The Manager reported to the Inspectors that this is a respite care service offered to foster carers with particularly difficult placements, the level of support to Children in Need in the community has been reduced under the current policy. All of the Social Workers in the Service can also deal with the arrangements for short break care. There are policies and procedures in place to meet the needs of this service. The Manager is currently advertising for a Social Worker to develop the short term break service.	3
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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?
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Family and friends as carers is no longer the remit of the fostering manager. This is now the responsibility of the Permanency Team Manager.	
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PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

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 <05 January 2004 > and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Comments and an action plan were received from the Provider.

These are available to view upon request from the SW London Local Office.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

NO

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

YES

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 17/05/2004, 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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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