



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Hertfordshire County Council Fostering Service

**County Hall
Hertford
Hertfordshire
SG13 8DP**

Lead Inspector
Marian Byrne

Announced Inspection
9th - 31th January 2007 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Hertfordshire County Council Fostering Service
Address	County Hall Hertford Hertfordshire SG13 8DP
Telephone number	01992 555555
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Hertfordshire County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Karen Devereux
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 1st February 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Hertfordshire Family Placement Service provides a service responsive to the needs of children who require a family placement. It aims to recruit sufficient carers to offer placement choice; aims to provide a placement that meets cultural, religious and racial background, where possible to provide local placements to maintain family networks.

The service operates from four premises within the county quadrants and provides respite care, short-term placements and kinship as well as long-term placements.

SUMMARY

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

This unannounced inspection took place between the 9th January and the 31st January 2007...

One inspector carried out the inspection. Information for the inspection was gathered by

- Visiting foster carers' homes
- Talking individually with young people, carers and staff
- Discussions with staff and carers
- Talking with the managers of the service
- Reviewing carers, young people and staff files
- Evaluating returned questionnaires from carers, young people.

The inspection identified one requirements.

Prior to and during the inspection 20% of foster carers and foster children were sent questionnaires. Approximately 25% were returned from both carers and children who are fostered. The majority were very positive about the service and the support they received.

What the service does well:

All foster carers stated that they were well supported by their social workers and that they had regular supervision. Foster carers confirmed that they get unannounced visits from social workers. Those spoken with said that when their social worker was unavailable that there was always a duty worker available to offer support and that the out of hours support was good. They felt that staff were very dedicated and endeavoured to offer the best possible service to both the children and foster carers. The staffing group is well established and there is little turnover of staff resulting in a service that can offer an excellent knowledge of the foster carers, ensuring that making matching children to carers is based on this knowledge. Comments from the questionnaire include 'the family placement is good but lack of field workers put a lot of pressure on the workers in the family placement team who we think are magnificent without them the system might collapse'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection a new team has been set up, the Central Placement Team, to place all children who come into the service. The benefits of this are that the team has access to all vacancies for children and are in a position, with consultation with local teams, to ensure optimum matching for children and carers. The staffing files were in order and contained all the information required.

What they could do better:

Some staffing photographs were photocopies of passports and the features were unclear and would not be proof of identity. It is recommended that copies of the same photographs be used for staff identities and their staffing files.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Management

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service is proactive in ensuring that the physical, mental and emotional health needs of the children who are fostered met.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering service has good links with health agencies and supports the foster carer to ensure the child in fostering has access to health care services. This was evidenced through questionnaires and visits. In the main the foster carer is provided with a description of the health care needs of the child or children they care for. Files inspected contained up to date information on the health care needs of the children. Foster carers visited stated that they were well supported by their social worker in accessing health care for the children.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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

3,6,8,9,15.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service is proactive in ensuring that the safety needs of children who are fostered are met.

EVIDENCE:

The team is well managed by competent managers. There are clear policies and procedures in place and well established lines of communication in place. The recruitment of foster carers is successful. This thorough process includes initial counselling on the role and responsibilities of foster carers. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out on all adult members of the family. References are cleared and the home is visited where a health and safety assessment is carried out (updated annually). Foster carers receive regular supervision and the foster carers spoken with confirmed that the social worker carries out unannounced visits. The service ensures it meet current legislation on the safe transportation of children. The service has recently changed the process of how children are placed with foster carers. A new team has been set up centrally to consider all applications for places for children. The team has access to all vacant placements in the County and working

closely with colleagues who have full knowledge of foster carers a placement is found for the child. This works across the County giving more scope to match the child and the carer. Supervising staff spoken with were initially concerned that their knowledge of the carers they supervise might be lost. However, this has been unfounded and they are contacted regularly for input into proposed placements. The manager of the team was keen to assure the inspector that her team would not function to its optimum without the specialist input from supervising social workers. The service has policies and procedures in place to ensure the protection of children who are fostered. Foster carers are made aware that corporal punishment is not acceptable. The service has a robust recruitment policy all staff have had the appropriate qualifications, training, identity and security checks. Some staffing files did not have a clear photograph of the staff member using photocopies of passport photographs that were indistinguishable. On this occasion the Panel was not observed.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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

7,13,31.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children are supported to enjoy their lives and to achieve their potential.

EVIDENCE:

The service has clear policies on promoting diversity. Training on diversity and anti-discriminatory practices is provided to staff and foster carers. All children have a Personal Education Plan. The PEP is reviewed regularly and is considered as part of the Statutory Review. Foster carers are expected to attend parent evening and school events.

Questionnaire returned by the children who are fostered indicated that their carers ensure that doing their school homework is a high priority. A Shared Care Scheme provides short breaks to disabled children.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

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

10,11.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This s judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Where appropriate children are supported with ongoing contact with their families. Children are consulted.

EVIDENCE:

The service ensures that each child in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in his care plan and foster placement agreement. One placement evidenced this where the children had contact with their parents when they chose to and had weekly contact with siblings. New foster carers are provided with specific training on facilitating and promoting contact. Transport and expenses are provided where needed to ensure the desired frequency of contact is maintained. Where deemed necessary contact is supervised. Children's views are sought where possible. The service conducted a Fostering service annual review and feedback in May 2006. Feedback was received from Children and young people, foster carers and shared carers and staff. One of the areas identified as being difficult to access was mental health services. This is an area the service has identified for further development. Most of the young people stated that they had been given information about being in care. Most of the children stated that they were asked for their opinions by the carers and cited subjects such as where to go on holiday, what to wear or the colour they wanted their bedroom to be.

The difficulty in obtaining the children's views was highlighted in the questionnaire from the children which indicated that they wanted to be

regarded as ordinary children and did not want to participate in any activity that sets them apart.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is **(excellent, good, adequate or poor)**

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

These standards were not inspected on this occasion.

EVIDENCE:

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1,16,17,21,24,25,32.

Quality in this outcome area is good.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service is well managed and run in the best interests of the child.

EVIDENCE:

There are sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff in the family placements teams, this was also verified by the majority of inspection questionnaires returned. There has been no change to County Council personnel policies and procedures in place covering supervision, training etc since the last inspection. The inspector found that the policies and procedures were followed. All foster carers spoken confirmed that they were well supported, received regular supervision and found communicating with their social workers and the office staff easy and productive. Files examined during the inspection contained the assessment and approval information. The appropriate references and checks were also found to be maintained on foster carer files inspected during the inspection. Case files in the Family Placement Team are very dependent upon the information passed from the young person's social worker. However, all files examined contained the information required. Records are appropriately maintained and stored. Care must be taken to ensure details of events and notifications under Schedule 8 regulation 43 are reported to this Commission.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS25	43(1)	The Registered manager must ensure that details of events and notifications under Schedule 8 regulation 43 are reported to this Commission.	31/01/07

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS25	It is recommended that the photographs stored on staff files are copies of those used on staff identification photographs.

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