



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Fostering Service**

Dept of Social Services and Housing

Time Square

Market Street

Bracknell

RG12 1JD

22nd – 25th March 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

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Fostering Services

Address

Dept of Social Services and Housing, Time Square,
Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD

Local Authority Manager

Diane Grist

Tel No:

01344

Address

Dept of Social Services and Housing, Time Square,
Market Street, Bracknell, RG12 1JD

Fax No:

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 ?

NO

Date of last inspection

/02/03

Date of Inspection Visit		22nd March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Sandra Sullivan	
Name of Inspector	2	Nikhil Dave	
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		Diane Grist	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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 Bracknell Forest Borough Council 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.

'The Fostering Service within Bracknell Forest Borough Council is provided by the Family Placement Team. This sits within the area of Inclusion, in Children's Services, part of the Social Services and Housing.'

'The Fostering Service is an integral part of the Borough's Children and Families Service sharing the same senior management structure.'

'The team operates generically, delivering not only the Fostering Service but also Supported Lodgings, adoption, community child-minding and placement finding services.'

Services provided in respect of foster care include

'a general fostering scheme, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups aged 0-18 years, in short term, long term and relief care placements.

A supported lodgings scheme for young people aged 16+

A specialist family based day/overnight respite care scheme to support children and young people with disabilities and their families.'

(Excerpts from the latest Statement of Purpose held by the Commission, dated October 2003)

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 annual inspection of the service since the introduction of the Fostering Services Regulations in April 2002. Two Inspectors carried it out over a period of four extended days in March 2004. The Inspectors were appreciative of the time given by the Manager and members of staff team, including the administrative staff.

Questionnaires were sent to all foster carers, foster children and placing authorities in advance of the inspection. Parents of children seen during the inspection were written to and an offer made to meet with them to discuss their view of the quality of care provided to their child.

A sample of foster carers and foster children was seen in the foster homes as part of the inspection and their respective social workers interviewed. In addition the managers and members of staff of the family placement team were interviewed individually, and the team seen as a group. An invitation was made for foster carers to meet with Inspectors as a group, although only a small number took this up. It had been hoped to meet with a group of foster children, but this was not possible, and will be a focus for a future inspection. Documentation relating to the service, including policies, procedures and records was read both before and during the inspection.

Verbal feedback of the main findings of the Inspection was given to the Children's Services Manager, and the Manager and Assistant Manager of the Family Placement Team at the conclusion of the Inspection.

Overall the team met, or almost met, all of the 32 National Minimum Standards. There are no areas of major shortfall. The service is well managed and foster carers were generally appreciative of the support received from staff. Some requirements and recommendations are made, and some advice given in the text of this report, to underpin the good practice seen on the inspection.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This Standard was met.

The latest Statement of Purpose is dated October 2003 and Inspectors were informed that the Members had approved it on 16th January 2004. The Statement of Purpose meets most of the requirements of the Standard, other than the experience of staff. It is recommended that this be included.

It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Authority produce a Children's Guide. This has now been done and, on the evidence of this inspection, children are aware of it and have received copies of it. It is recommended that consideration be given to producing the

guide in a version aimed at teenagers, and in formats suitable for younger children and those with a disability.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2-3)

These standards were met.

The Manager has a substantial amount of experience, having worked in Family Placement since 1981. She has been the Manager of this service since 2002. Members of the team spoken with all said that they felt well supported by both the Manager and Assistant Manager.

Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4-5)

These standards were met.

There are clear lines of communication and accountability between Managers and staff. It was evident from the meeting with members of the staff team that they had a clear understanding of lines of responsibility. The Manager and all members of staff in the team have job descriptions. Since the last inspection an assistant team manager has been appointed who has considerable experience in childcare services, and whose experience compliments that of the Manager.

Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6-14)

6 of these Standards were met. There were minor shortfalls on the remaining 3.

The foster homes visited were all warm and adequately furnished and communal areas were decorated to an acceptable standard. Issues identified with regard to individual children's accommodation were passed to the Manager for attention.

There is a need to ensure that written risk assessments are completed in instances where a foster child shares a bedroom.

The fostering service does support some cross-cultural placements. A Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) needs form has been introduced to consider when placing children in foster care. One of the placements looked at in detail on this inspection was cross-cultural. There was no clear evidence on file that a placement agreement had been drawn up which clearly identified gaps in the match between child and carer and the steps taken to compensate for them.

There was evidence of the Foster Panel being involved in matching, particularly for children for whom a long-term placement was under consideration. There is a need to provide fuller written evidence of pre-placement planning for all children.

There was evidence that carers are persistently asked to take children for whom they are not approved. The Authority had recognised this issue from their own survey of foster carers earlier in the year. This needs to be addressed urgently.

Training for foster carers includes training on Safe Care, and clear processes for dealing with allegations of neglect or other abuse of a child in foster care, and processes for managing allegations against carers.

There were clear contact arrangements in place for most of the children tracked as part of this inspection. The introduction of a Foster Placement agreement will assist in reducing confusion about arrangements and roles where that does occur.

Inspectors heard of a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring children's views are sought.

Foster carers spoken with gave clear examples of how the health needs of children are promoted, and children spoken with confirmed this.

Young people and carers spoke positively about the good links in place with education.

Older foster children spoken with felt they were being given appropriate help to assist them in developing the skills they needed for independent living.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

6 of these Standards were met. There were minor shortfalls on the remaining 3.

It was a requirement last year that the Personnel Department acquaint themselves with the Regulations in respect of staff recruitment. On the sample of files examined on this occasion there were some shortfalls. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 state that all the information detailed in Schedule 1 (Regulations 5,7, and 20) is required in respect of all 'Persons seeking to carry on manage or work for the purposes of a Fostering Service'.

There is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Staff spoken with confirmed that they received regular supervision from their line manager, and were positive about both the formal and informal support networks in place.

There was evidence that assessments of prospective carers are carried out thoroughly, and by suitably qualified workers.

Staff spoken with were very concerned about the impact planned changes in administrative support to the team would have on their work, and on the service. There is a need for the Authority to ensure that Standards 16.10, 16.11, and 16.12 continue to be met in any changes to the administrative arrangements for this service.

At the time of this inspection it appeared that there were sufficient staff to carry out the fostering assessments required. Since the last inspection a Whistle blowing procedure has been introduced as recommended.

Records seen showed that there were sound employment practices in place.

Support to carers out of office hours has been increased in the last year. Carers spoken with were all aware of this new service, and those who had used it spoke very positively about it.

Annual reviews of foster carers have, historically been conducted by the supervising social worker. The inherent weaknesses in this system have been recognised and, at the time of this inspection, new arrangements were planned. Reports of annual reviews for existing carers have not been taken to panel, as required under Regulation 29(5). Arrangements need to be made for this to be done.

A new Foster Carers Handbook had just been completed, and was about to be distributed to existing foster carers. This has been a very big piece of work, and will provide carers with all the information they need.

Records (Standards 24-25)

These standards were met.

Comprehensive case records were available for the children and young people tracked as

part of this inspection. A sample of records of individual children and young people living in foster care was examined, alongside a corresponding sample of records relating to the foster carers caring for them. All records were in good order.

Fitness of Premises for Use as a Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This standard was met

The workers in the family placement team sit together in one area of an open plan office shared with other teams in the children and families division of the department.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

Two of the three standards in this section are not applicable to Local Authority Fostering Services. The third was met.

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. They are well publicised and reviewed regularly. Carers spoken with all praised the Authority saying they received payments promptly and that the payments were always correct. This aspect of the service is managed directly by the administrative section of the service and is not delegated to the financial section of the Authority.

Fostering Panels (Standard 30)

This standard was not evaluated on this occasion.

Short-term Breaks (Standard 31)

There was a minor shortfall on this standard.

It was noted last year that no worker could be recruited to develop this service. This has not changed in the last year, despite attempts to recruit. It is clearly unsatisfactory for this service to be allowed to drift. It is recommended that the service be reviewed, and action taken to ensure that the identified staffing requirements are fulfilled.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This standard was met.

The Authority has a clear set of policies and procedures relating to 'Kinship care'. The one kinship carer spoken with during the inspection felt well supported by the Family Placement Team.

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:

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 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	Sandra Sullivan	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Nikhil Dave	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	11/05/04		_____

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 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	Regulation 5, 7, 20	FS15 and FS25	Ensure all information required by Schedule 1 is available on the files of all who work for the Fostering Service.	By 29/06/04
2	Regulation 34, Schedule 6	FS7 and FS8	Placement Agreements need to be introduced.	By 29/06/04
3	Regulation	FS6	There is a need to ensure that written risk assessments are completed in instances where a foster child shares a bedroom.	By 29/05/04
4	Regulation 34 (1)(b)	FS8	Ensure that children are placed with carers who are approved to care for them.	From 29/03/04
5	Regulation 29(5)	FS21	Ensure that Panel considers the first review undertaken since 1.04.02 for all carers.	By 29/09/04

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	It is recommended that the experience of staff is included in the Statement of Purpose.

2	FS1	It is recommended that consideration be given to producing the children's guide in a version aimed at teenagers, and in formats suitable for younger children and those with a disability.
3	FS8	Consideration is to be given to appropriateness of the role of placement organisers for placements other than fostering.
4	FS15	It is recommended that evidence of telephone enquiries on staff carried out as part of the checks on their suitability is routinely entered on personnel files.
5	FS22	It is recommended that unannounced visits to carers are routinely carried out, and recorded.
6	FS31	It is recommended that the service be reviewed, and action taken to ensure that the identified staffing requirements are fulfilled.
7	FS32	It is recommended that evidence of the assessment on which the carers allowance is based in kinship care, be included on the carer's file.

* 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	10.5
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	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	22/03/04
Time of Inspection	9.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	70

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?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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It was a requirement of the last inspection that the Authority produce a Children's Guide. This has now been done and, on the evidence of this inspection, children are aware of it and have received copies of it. It is a colourful and informative guide, targeted at children in the middle age range with English as their first language. Inspectors were informed that the Authority would be able to produce the guide in a variety of other languages if required. It is recommended that consideration be given to producing the guide in a version aimed at teenagers, and in formats suitable for younger children and those with a disability.

It was noted last year that the Statement of Purpose was in need of updating, and that evidence was needed that the Elected Members had approved it. This has now been done. The latest Statement of Purpose is dated October 2003 and Inspectors were informed that the Members had approved it on 16th January 2004.

The Statement of Purpose meets most of the requirements of the Standard, other than the experience of staff. It is recommended that this be included.

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

The Manager has a substantial amount of experience, having worked in Family Placement since 1981. She has been the Manager of this service since 2002. It was recommended last year that the Manager undertake training in management to meet the requirements of this standard. Inspectors were informed on this inspection that this is underway. The manager is currently studying for a Certificate in Management Studies, which she is due to complete Summer 2004.

Members of the team spoken with all said that they felt well supported by both the Manager and Assistant Manager.

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

The Personnel file of the Manager was not in the sample examined on this inspection, although the file of the recently appointed Assistant Team Manager was. This file met the Bracknell Forest requirements for an internal applicant. (See Standard 15 for further comments on recruitment processes).

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?

3

There are clear lines of communication and accountability between Managers and staff. It was evident from the meeting with members of the staff team that they had a clear understanding of lines of responsibility.

Although Local Authority fostering services are not statutorily required to notify the Commission of the incidents listed below, this information is requested annually as part of the pre-inspection information.

It was evident from discussions with foster carers that supervising social workers monitor their records.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

X

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

X

Serious illness or accident of a child.

X

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

X

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

X

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

X

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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 Manager and all members of staff in the team have job descriptions and, on interview, were clear about their roles and any areas of particular responsibility.

Since the last inspection an assistant team manager has been appointed. She has considerable experience in child care services, although this is her first appointment in Family Placement. Her experience is seen to be complimentary to that of the Manager. Staff members confirmed this.

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?

2

As part of this inspection Inspectors 'tracked' the care of four children and young people. Each of their foster homes was visited. The homes were all warm and furnished and communal areas decorated to an acceptable standard.

One child's bedroom was in need of redecoration, and in another, consideration needed to be given to how the room was furnished to make best use of the space and to ensure the young person could get out easily in the case of an emergency. These comments were passed to the Manager who agreed to follow them up.

There is a need to ensure that written risk assessments are completed in instances where a foster child shares a bedroom.

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?

2

The fostering service does support some cross-cultural placements. The issue of diversity is covered in the Looked After children paperwork. It was a recommendation last year that practice in valuing diversity be developed. Inspectors were informed that awareness of these issues has increased over the past year and a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) needs form has been introduced to consider when placing children in foster care. In addition the Authority is undertaking a BME audit.

One of the placements looked at in detail on this inspection was cross-cultural. The child had been placed with carers who were of a different race and culture, and who were not approved to take a child of that age. The placement of this child took them over numbers. It was evident that the placement was under considerable stress. There was no clear evidence on file that a placement agreement had been drawn up which clearly identified gaps in the match between child and carer and the steps taken to compensate for them.

It is advised that consideration be given to providing foster carers with training on cross-cultural placements.

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?

2

The Family Placement team operates a placement finding service for all children and young people identified by social workers as needing a placement. This includes the identification of suitable residential placements for children and young people for whom a family placement is not deemed appropriate, or for whom one is not available.

This is done through the duty service provided by the family placement team. Inspectors heard that this work could be very time consuming and detract from the team's core tasks. Although some knowledge has been built up through doing this work, the workers do not know either the child or the placement. Either they are providing an administrative service in simply identifying vacancies, or they are expected to be providing a degree of expertise and matching, in which case detailed knowledge of residential placements is required. It was recommended last year that consideration be given to appropriateness of the role of placement organisers for placements other than fostering. This recommendation is repeated this year.

The Local Authority uses the formats produced by the Department of Health for the recording of information and plans in relation to children Looked After. There was evidence from records, and minutes of the Foster Panel meetings, of the Panel being involved in matching, particularly for children for whom a long-term placement was under consideration. Less formal matching processes were in place for children placed in an emergency or for short-term care.

There was a lack of evidence on files of pre-placement planning, although discussions with the managers and workers indicated that there was more planning than the evidence suggested.

There was evidence that carers are persistently asked to take children for whom they are not approved. In some cases this appeared to be due to delays in taking proposals to change the terms of approval to Panel. The Authority had already identified this. In a survey of foster carers undertaken by the Authority in January 2004, 63% of respondents had been asked to take a child outside their terms of approval, and 48% had been over numbers. This is not acceptable.

There is a need to ensure that children are placed with carers who are approved to care for them. Where a child is placed outside the carer's terms of approval this should be a rare exception, and detailed in the Placement Agreement.

If the terms of approval need to be reviewed then this needs to be put before Panel.

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
<p>It was a requirement of the last inspection that the fostering service produce a policy to protect children from abuse and neglect. This has now been done. Foster carers spoken with were aware of the policy on safe care, and of the guidelines for safe care within their own home.</p> <p>There are clear processes for dealing with allegations of neglect or other abuse of a child in foster care, and processes for managing allegations against carers.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

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
<p>It was recommended last year that foster placement agreements be introduced. This was specifically noted in respect of contact arrangements. There were clear contact arrangements in place for most of the children tracked as part of this inspection. However Inspectors did identify some issues in respect of contact arrangements for one of the children. The fostering service manager considered that the Looked After children documentation covered the areas specified in the Foster Placement Agreement schedule. Inspectors consider that introducing a specific Foster Placement Agreement is essential, and may assist in reducing any confusion about arrangements achieve clarity of roles between foster parents, family placement workers and the children's social workers.</p>		

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
<p>Inspectors heard of a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring children's views are sought.</p> <p>Children spoken with as part of this inspection said they knew how to make complaints. They all had a copy of the Children's Guide. There was evidence in records of children's views on their care being sought, especially through reviews.</p> <p>The Authority has commissioned an advocacy service for Looked After young people run by the Voice for the Child in Care.</p> <p>The Authority has a Corporate Parenting Group, with Member representation. The Children's Participation Officer noted that it had been hoped to have a Looked After young person as a member of this group, but this had not been possible to date.</p> <p>A group has been running for young people aged 15 plus, some of whom may be in foster</p>		

care, to discuss issues concerning them.

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

Foster carers spoken with gave clear examples of how the health needs of children are promoted, and children spoken with confirmed this. This was especially evident in the case of a young child with born with disabilities and a drug dependency, who needed a great deal of medical care.

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

Young people and carers spoke positively about the good links in place with education. One young person, placed by a neighbouring authority, was not so positive.

Bracknell ensures that every child of an appropriate age in a foster home has access to a computer, linked up to the education network. Inspectors were informed that every child in foster care has a Personal education plan.

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

The Authority has policies and procedures in place in respect of young people leaving Local Authority care. Older foster children spoken with felt they were being given appropriate help to assist them in developing the skills they needed for independent living.

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?

2

It was a requirement last year that the Personnel Department acquaint themselves with the Regulations in respect of staff recruitment. On the sample of files examined on this occasion there were some shortfalls. On one file there was a discrepancy between dates provided on a CV and those noted in the reference from that ex-employer. The reference had been received after the interview had been conducted. There was no evidence on the file that the discrepancy had been discussed with the candidate.

On another file there was no evidence of qualifications stated on the CV.

There was no evidence on files of telephone enquiries to follow up on references, although Inspectors were informed that this is done. It is recommended that evidence of such calls is routinely entered on personnel files.

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are being undertaken on newly appointed staff, and have been done on all staff working within the Family Placement Team.

Inspectors were informed that it is not currently the policy of the Authority to check staff who were in post prior to the introduction of the CRB, where a Police check had previously been done. Inspectors were made aware of a review of administrative support services which may lead to changes in the way administrative support is delivered to the Family Placement Team. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 state that all the information detailed in Schedule 1 (Regulations 5,7, and 20) is required in respect of all 'Persons seeking to carry on manage or work for the purposes of a Fostering Service'. It is the view of the Inspectors that CRB checks at the enhanced level will be required in respect of any members of staff, working in any capacity for the Fostering Service, including Administrative staff.

Total number of staff of the agency:

X

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

X

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**

There is a clear management structure in place with clear lines of accountability. Staff spoken with confirmed that they received regular supervision from their line manager, and were positive about both the formal and informal support networks in place.

There was evidence from discussion with staff and foster carers, and from an examination of files, that assessments of prospective carers are carried out thoroughly, and by suitably qualified workers.

At the time of this inspection the family placement team enjoyed a good level of administrative support. Inspectors were informed that some changes were planned in response to a review of administration support carried out by the wider Department. Staff spoken with were very concerned about the impact this would have on their work, and on the service. There is a need for the Authority to ensure that Standards 16.10, 16.11, and 16.12 continue to be met in any changes to the administrative arrangements for this service.

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 this inspection it appeared that there were sufficient staff to carry out the fostering assessments required. The manager noted that prioritisation of work was needed to accomplish this, and that, it had been decided to limit the number of adoption applications assessed each year in order to prioritise the fostering ones.

Although the team was almost fully staffed at the time of this inspection this masked some issues in respect of recruitment and retention of staff. (See comment on the staffing issues in relation to the short break service under Standard 31). Inspectors were also informed that one social work post had been converted to a Social Work Assistant post owing to the problems in recruiting qualified social workers. As noted in Standard 8 the team source residential placements in addition to family based placements.

There is a need to establish the core functions of the team. As noted in Standard 8 the team source residential placements in addition to family based placements. This appears to be an additional activity to their family finding. This situation needs to be kept under review to ensure the service is adequately staffed to carry out its full range of statutory duties.

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

Since the last inspection a Whistle blowing procedure has been introduced as recommended.

Records seen showed that there were sound employment practices in place.

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

From discussion, and from information provided prior to the inspection it is evident that good training opportunities exist. All qualified staff are encouraged to undertake post qualifying training, and a range of internal and external courses are available.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

All staff have regular supervision and annual appraisals are planned over the coming months. There are regular staff meetings.

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?****2**

Foster carers spoken with all felt well supported by their supervising social workers, and spoke positively about these relationships.

Support to carers out of office hours has been increased in the last year. In addition to the authority wide Emergency Duty Team, foster carers can now access a member of the family placement team by telephone during the evenings and at weekends. Carers spoken with were all aware of this new service, and those who had used it spoke very positively about it. It is advised that a record be kept of all call and of the times when the worker needs to respond by going out to the carer. The service could then be monitored and evaluated.

Annual reviews of foster carers have, historically been conducted by the supervising social worker. The inherent weaknesses in this system have been recognised and, at the time of this inspection, new arrangements were planned. From discussion it would appear that the proposed system will incorporate a considerable degree of independence. Inspectors welcome this move and look forward to seeing it in operation on future inspections. Reports of annual reviews for existing carers have not been taken to panel, as required under Regulation 29(5). Arrangements need to be made for this to be done.

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**

It was recommended last year that the authority develop an up to date handbook for foster carers. At the time of this inspection this had just been completed, and was about to be distributed to existing foster carers. Copies will then be given to all new carers on approval. This has been a very big piece of work, and will provide carers with all the information they need. It is in a loose-leaf format, so should be relatively easy to maintain up to date.

The authority has clear expectations of the role of supervising social workers, including the requirement for unannounced visits. From discussion with children and carers, and from records, it is evident that this is an area that needs to be tightened up. Inspectors detected some reluctance from workers to “check up” on carers in this way. However, these visits are a vital part of the monitoring of the service provided, and the protection of children’s welfare.

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**

From discussion with the Manager, and from meetings with carers it is evident that joint arrangements with neighbouring authorities are in place for pre-approval training.

NVQ training is available to carers and, at the time of this inspection, inspectors were informed that seven carers had achieved their NVQ level 3, and a further four carers were in the process of completing it.

In addition there is a foster carers conference each year. Carers spoke of these occasions as being good fun and very informative. The programme of the last conference in October 2003 included external speakers on Sharing Personal Information, Drugs Awareness and Safe Care/Child Protection.

Inspectors were informed that training opportunities are made available to all carers, although uptake varies considerably, and that there is an expectation that carers will attend four training sessions a year.

It is advised that a more systematic approach is taken to post approval training, and that this is considered more fully in the annual reviews.

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
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Comprehensive case records were available for the children and young people tracked as part of this inspection. There were separate records in respect of the carers.

Foster carers said the amount of information they are given about a child varies considerably, especially when a child is placed in an emergency, when little information may be available. Carers are given a lockable storage facility to store records. Records they make about a child are seen, and signed by the supervising social worker on each visit.

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
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A sample of records of individual children and young people living in foster care was examined, alongside a corresponding sample of records relating to the foster carers caring for them. All records were in good order.

Files were stored securely. Inspectors were informed that, at the time of the Inspection, only administrative staff working for the family placement team had access to the files, but that following the review of support services it was anticipated that this access would be extended to a wider range of administrative staff. It is required that staff who have such access have a valid CRB check.

Foster carers are supplied with a lockable storage facility for confidential records.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			37
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

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

The workers in the family placement team sit together in one area of an open plan office shared with other teams in the children and families division of the department. Appropriate security measures to regulate access to the building were found to be in place at the time of the inspection.

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?

9

Not Applicable to Local Authority Services.

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?

9

Not applicable to local Authority Services.

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

There is a clear policy on foster care allowances. They are well publicised and reviewed regularly. Carers spoken with all praised the Authority saying they received payments promptly and that the payments were always correct. This aspect of the service is managed directly by the administrative section of the service.

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?	0
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The panel was not observed on this inspection. The panel is a joint one with one other Local Authority and an Independent Fostering Agency. It was formed in response to the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

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?

2

The Bracknell Family Placement Team offers a short-term break service for people with a learning disability. Historically this service has matched both children and adults with carers who have offered regular respite care. Although historical arrangements are continuing the service is not being developed.

It was noted last year that there was no worker specialising in this scheme, and that work was being managed primarily through the duty system of the fostering service. It was recommended last year that consideration be given to the staffing requirements of this scheme. There has been no change to these arrangements in the past year. The Manager noted that several attempts had been made to fill the post without success. Reasons for this are unclear, but Inspectors were informed that the rates of pay and annual leave are lower in Bracknell than in neighbouring authorities, and that this has hampered attempts to recruit.

It is clearly unsatisfactory for this service to be allowed to drift. It is recommended that the service be reviewed, and action taken to ensure that the identified staffing requirements are fulfilled.

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?	3
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The Authority has a clear set of policies and procedures relating to 'Kinship care'. The one kinship carer spoken with during the inspection felt well supported by the Family Placement Team.

Inspectors were informed that fostering allowances for children placed in kinship care are based on an assessment of the child's circumstances and needs. It is recommended that evidence of this assessment be included on the carer's file.

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 22nd – 25th March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

As a result of the inspection, all points detailed in the Statutory Requirements have either been implemented, or there is an Action Plan identified to ensure compliance within a given timescale.

The Good Practice Recommendations identified from the inspection are also issues that Bracknell Forest will undertake. An Action Plan with timescales has also been produced to ensure that all recommendations will be implemented.

There is concern about some Standards that have been marked as 3 – Standard Met (no shortfalls) and where we think we either deserve a 4 – Standard Exceeded (Commendable), or where we would like to achieve this through exceeding our current provision. These are detailed below.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

We have met the standard at every point and believe that this reaches a 4.

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.8)

This standard was met and comment made on particular evidence and we believe that this merits a 4.

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.8)

This standard was also met and comment made on evidence of good practice. This was compared to a neighbouring authority.

No mention was made of the Education Co-ordinator post that we have, who addresses and responds to the individual needs of children and carers.

We question why this was not awarded a 4.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.5)

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.7)

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.5)

We would like to enquire what more we need to implement so that we may improve this service to a 4 rating.

Standard 26 (26.1-26.5)

As we met all the standard and this relates to premises being appropriate for the purpose, what more would you expect us to achieve a 4 rating?

Finally, the department is committed to achieving and providing an excellent Foster Care Service to carers and the children and young people as well as all those who may have contact with the department. In order to achieve this we are undertaking an Action Plan in respect of all parts of the inspection and would welcome your comments in order to achieve this.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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 Diane Grist of Bracknell Forest Borough Council 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 Diane Grist of Bracknell Forest Borough Council 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.