



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Plymouth City Council Local Authority
Fostering Agency**

Civic Centre

Plymouth

Devon

PL1 2EW

16th 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

Plymouth City Council Local Authority Fostering Agency

Address

Civic Centre, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 2EW

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

01752 668000

Address

Civic Centre, Plymouth, Devon, PL1 2EW

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 Plymouth City Council
Paul Mansell

Name of Registered Manager Barbara Wick

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

N/A

Date of Inspection Visit		16th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Michelle Oxley	075420
Name of Inspector	2	Emmy Tomsett	
Name of Inspector	3	Derek Curtis	
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			

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
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- 8. Financial requirements**
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- 10. Short-term breaks**
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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 Plymouth City Council Local Authority Fostering Agency. 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.

Plymouth City Council is a Unitary Authority in Devon. The Foster Care Service is a part of Children's service provision within the city. At the time of the inspection the Plymouth Foster service provided placements for 142 children. The day-to-day management of the service was undertaken by 3 team Managers and overseen by the head of Children's services. The team had responsibility for recruitment selection, training and support of all the cities foster carers

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 Plymouth City Foster Care Services first Inspection against *National Minimum Standards*. This inspection was conducted over a period of 1 month and was carried out by 3 inspectors. As part of the inspection, foster cares, parents and children were surveyed. The survey responses from foster cares was particularly low, this was disappointing. A selection of foster carers and children interviewed. Selected staff and Managers working for the service were interviewed and policy documents, documentation to support the care systems were examined, case tracking of 4 children was undertaken 2 inspectors observed a panel meeting.

We would like to acknowledge the assistance provided in undertaking this inspection particularly from staff throughout the team who responded positively to this inspection. We would also like to thank young people families and carers for their time and their participation

The purpose of the inspection was to assess the foster care services effectiveness in terms of meeting the need of the children and young people using the service; against National Minimum Standards

The overall assessment following this inspection was that:

1. Social Service as a whole and the foster care service were undergoing a period of significant change, which impacted upon this inspection. At the time of this inspection and as part of a strategic plan for Children's Services as a whole, the foster care service was about to undergo restructure. The plan was for the team to split in to 2 separate teams providing and specialising in, either fostering or adoption.

2. The service Manager had provided the Inspection team with the required policy documentation and documentation to support some care practices prior to the inspection. This indicated a willingness work toward meeting National Minimum Standards.

3. Pre Inspection discussions with the Head of Children's service established that there was an acknowledgement and an awareness that much work would be required to ensure that the service operated in line with minimum standards in the future and that a strategy for the future was being developed

4. The service lacked structure. The approach to providing care was informal rather than being based on a clearly defined framework and this is evident through examination of files and discussion with foster carers and link workers. There was little or no evidence that the systems to support and verify the actions and approach of staff were in place and that the service relied primarily on the knowledge and informal approaches of team members

5. There was little evidence that systems were in place to ensure that the views of children were heard either directly, through an advocacy service or through the services own complaints procedure

6. A significant number of foster carers reported a feeling of isolation and said they lacked support. This was attributed to shortages in staffing within the service

7. The procedures of the panel were not robust in that approvals were made before all information was available to them. The quality of social work reports to panel was varied in terms of quality. Cases brought to panel were reported to be well over due and this was evidence through observation of panel

8. It is acknowledged that the inspection took place during a time of turbulence. It is envisaged that the service will be better placed at the next inspection to set out its vision for the future

9. Three of four foster care files examined were over numbers (had more children than were approved for by panel.) There was no evidence on file of a return to panel, exemption certificate, assessment by senior Manager or report summarizing the events

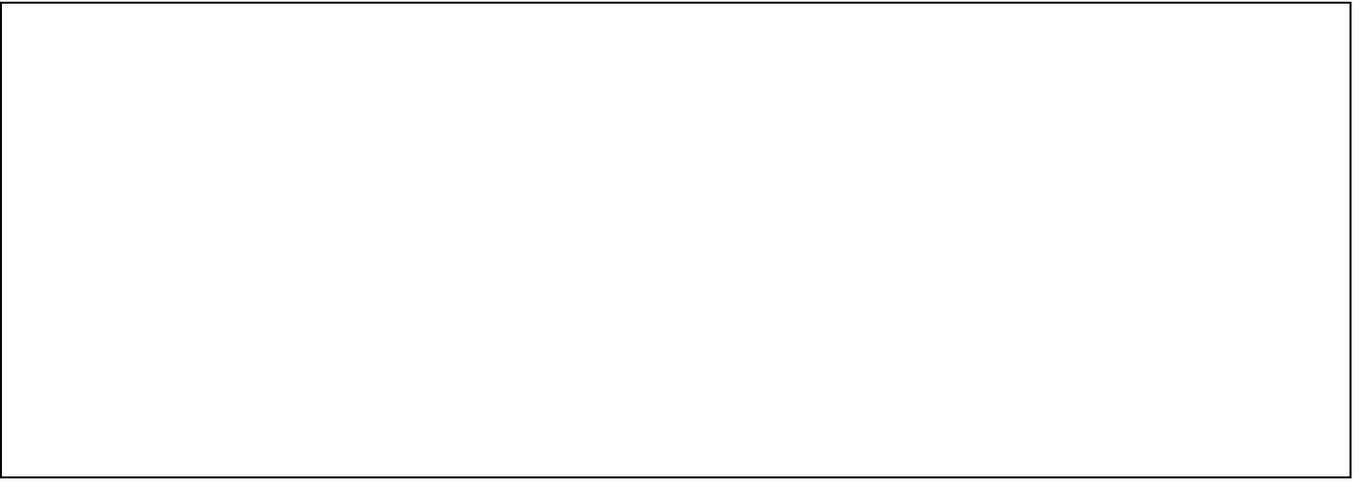
10. 49 Young Person questionnaire were returned.

71% of these felt that the fostering service consulted them 77% felt that the complaints process had been explained to them, 61% had received a young persons guide. 24% reported being seen alone by their social worker 59% sometimes being seen alone and 16% said that they were never seen alone by the social worker. None of the questionnaires returned from young people reported bullying although the questionnaires did not explicitly ask this

11. 27 foster care questionnaire were returned

40% felt satisfied with the support received from the service, 59% felt they were kept informed of issue effecting the young person, 66% felt consulted about decisions being made regarding the young person, 88% had received information on making complaints. 60% felt that they did not receive information about the young persons background. 88% felt that the service was under staffed. 51% felt that their opinions were not sought by the fostering service.

It must be noted that whilst some figures reflect some degree of support experience by foster carers the narrative on the questionnaire frequently contradicted the "YES" in the box. It must also be acknowledged that unfortunately only a small number of young person and foster carer questionnaires were returned to the inspection 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:

NO

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?

NA

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	Michelle Oxley	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	Derek Curtis	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Emmy Tomsett	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	3,4	FS1	The Statement of Purpose must reflect the actual service provided and any changes made. The children's guide must be a "child friendly" document, it must include information about how to access advocacy services	31/12/04
2	29	FS6	Formalised systems to record and ensure that 1: premises used by foster cares are suitable and fit and 2: children are transported safely, must be devised and implemented. These systems must reflect dates name of worker and date for review	31/12/04
3	33,34	FS8	Evidence of how children were matched to children must be provided. The matching process must involve children, parents, carers and other professionals and provide evidence that this has occurred	31/12/04
4	12	FS9	There must be a system to record, collate and evaluate the circumstances, numbers and outcomes of all allegations of abuse and neglect. Every foster home must be provided with a policy regarding safe caring	31/12/04
5	11	FS11	A system for ensuring that children are consulted and their views heard and accounted for must be devised	31/12/04

6	18	FS11	Children must be given direct access to the foster care services complaint processes, this must include information about advocacy services	31/12/04
7	15	FS12	A system ensuring health needs are assessed and monitored must be implemented. Foster cares must be provided with information about health needs of children on every occasion	31/12/04
8	16	FS13	Details of educational provision to meet the needs for each child must be clearly recorded	31/12/04
9	21	FS19	A formalised system of training for staff must be established in line with this standard	31/12/04
10	29,30	FS21	A clear strategy must be devised to combat the feeling of isolation expressed by foster carers	31/12/04
11	29	FS22	Foster care agreements must be up to date and provide clear accurate information	31/12/04
12	22	FS24	Children's files must contain up to date information relevant to the needs and circumstances of each child	31/12/04
13	30,	FS25	Foster carers files must contain up to date and relevant information including young persons care plan , young persons core assessment, details of all young people placed, panel minutes, review minutes, approval documentation, payment details and contact log	31/12/04
14	30	FS29	A system must be devised to ensure that payments to foster carers are not significantly delayed	31/12/04

15	27,28,29, 30	FS30	The panel must first obtain completed assessments, all references and ensure each carer has been comprehensively vetted prior to being approved. Placements must only be approved where thorough, contemporary and comprehensive information is available. Decisions regarding the continuation of placements must be made with in a reasonable time scale. These must be brought to panel at the earliest opportunity so that the time the child has already spent in the placement is not the over ridding factor in the decision making process.	31/12/04
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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	FS7	Carers should be recruited from a variety of diverse backgrounds and documentation provided to carers should be produced in a variety of accessible formats
2	FS10	Evidence that the arrangements for contact are monitored and reviewed should be provided
3	FS14	Foster carers must be provided with sufficient information regarding the facilitation of the transition to independent living and there should be evidence that children have been consulted as part of this process.
4	FS17	The deficits in staff numbers should be addressed staff should receive training regarding children who have disabilities
5	FS18	The level of support given to all staff and carers should be increased
6	FS23	The service should ensure that all carers attend training provided and particularly specific training related to the needs of individual children

* 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	9
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• 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	YES
• 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	NO
Interview with panel chair	NO
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	YES
Date of Inspection	16/03/04
Time of Inspection	9.30
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?

2

The Statement of Purpose required amending to reflect proposed changes in the organisation which were planned including changes in staffing which have occurred following this inspection

The children's guide was not a child friendly document and omitted information about accessing advocacy service

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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At the time of this inspection a team of 3 Managers managed the fostering service. The Managers said that the Management team possessed qualifications relevant to the role and each had considerable experience of work with children as well as working within fostering and adoption teams and held professional social work qualifications. This was verified in the Statement of purpose

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?	9
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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

The Manager said that as part of a quality review process, the service seeks feed back from foster carers annually. Foster care questionnaires confirmed this, although a proportion of respondents indicated that they were somewhat dissatisfied with response times, lack of support and lack of reaction to issues of concern.

The roles of managers and staff were laid out in the statement of Purpose and both staff and foster carers were clear about lines of responsibility and optimistic about future changes to the structure

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

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

1

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

7

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

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 Managers job description was seen. Lines of delegation, accountability and responsibility were clear to staff and foster carers who were spoken to confirmed this to be the case

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?	
<p>Link workers said that they inspected the premises on an annual basis and that this was an informal procedure. No evidence could be found to confirm this on the foster carers file. No evidence of risk assessment in terms of premises was found. Although files indicated that the premises were inspected at the point of the foster carers application a formalised system for the continual monitoring of premise in relation to health, safety and suitability could not be evidenced.</p> <p>The training plan and responses from foster carers confirmed that preparation and training covered health and safety issues.</p> <p>A formalised system for ensuring the safe transportation of children by foster carers could not be evidenced.</p>	1	

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?	
<p>Discussions with both staff, management and foster carers revealed that whilst the fostering service is aware that the majority of foster carers are White British, there is an increasing need to recruit significantly more carers from alternative ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>Staff spoke of difficulty in recruitment.</p> <p>Campaigns to target future carers from diverse backgrounds appear to be on-going.</p> <p>All staff spoken with felt that the approval process is good and not discriminating and were pleased to have approved carers irrespective of their sexuality, disability and cultural background.</p> <p>Staff and carers stated that documents can be translated for non-English speaking carers or children. However, there did not appear to be a base of documents already translated into other languages that are known to be spoken within the Plymouth area already.</p> <p>It was noted that all staff and carers spoken with were of White/British origin.</p>	2	

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?**

1

Discussion with link workers and managers confirmed that process of matching children to carers was primarily undertaken at the weekly team meeting. This involved discussion around the skills of the carers which were known to the team and by the information including the core assessment and information regarding a Childs ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs, collected at the point of referral. Discussions verified that the child, parent, carers and other relevant professionals were not involved directly in this process. Although link workers were clear that the positive relations existed with other professionals and that there was a culture of cooperation and information sharing. However, specific written information regarding the elements which were taken into consideration when agreeing the placement could not be evidenced.

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?**

1

The training plan provided stated that foster carers initially completed a total of 11 weeks training and that this included safe caring, managing behaviour and recognition of abuse. This was confirmed by foster carers and link workers. A written policy on safe caring was not evidenced.

The foster service had received 0 reports of bullying however, there were no clear systems for collecting such information

The Manager said that systems were being developed to collate and evaluate information about allegations but could not be evidenced at the time of inspection. Foster carer files examined did not document frequent and consistent communication between link worker and young persons social worker in between LAC reviews.

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?**

2

The arrangements for contact were discussed and summarised at the Foster carers reviews, however, many minutes of annual reviews were either missing or had not taken place. Link workers saw contact as part of the matching process and emphasised the relevance of ensuring potential foster carers could meet contact arrangements.

Contact was included in the 11 week training received by carers. Link workers said that they would informally monitor contact arrangements and provide support where required. The majority of responses from foster carers indicated that they felt supported by the link worker in this area.

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?**

1

The training plan included information about listening to views, a video was also used in the introductory part of the course to stress the importance of listening to children.

Link workers said that children were always given information from the reviewing officer about how to complain, however the complaint system provided to children directly from the service was not clear and it appeared that the Childs social worker was seen as responsible for ascertaining and recording the views of children.

In discussions with both managers and link workers and from documentary evidence it became clear that the fostering service does not have any formal or informal systems for seeking the views of children they have placed. The single method of communication appears to be that the child's social worker seeks views and would presumably feedback to the fostering team any issues.

However, up to date LAC review minutes could not be found on some files sampled in order to capture this information and no formal lines of communication could be evidenced between social workers and link workers.

The fostering service could not evidence any attempt to seek the young persons or carers views in the form of questionnaires. Many foster carer and young person questionnaires that were returned to the inspection team, raised the fact that they were not consulted on issues specific to the placement or on process, procedure and practice. 14 young people stated that the foster service had not made contact with them.

The fostering service was unable to evidence that children knew how to raise concerns or complaints directly. 11 young people stated that they did not know how to complain

As a result the fostering service appears to have no overall mechanism for monitoring outcomes, the success or achievements of their service from the young people they place.

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?	1
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Foster carer training included the importance of health and development. Link workers said that health needs and diet would be monitored as part of their role, however there was no formal system for recording that this had been done. There was no evidence that a written health records had been provided to each carer for each child and that this had been monitored and updated throughout the placement.

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?	1
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Whilst link workers and foster carers acknowledged that child care planning incorporated educational needs this could not be verified as there was no documentation to confirm that educational provision had been considered in files examined

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?	2
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Training for foster carers included promoting independence. Discussions indicated that a leaving care worker would be allocated to the child.
 There was no clear written requirement of what was expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children for independent living or specific training provided to carers.
 There was no evidence to demonstrate that young people preparing for leaving care were involved in decision making processes.
 The selected file sample did not include children of leaving care age on this occasion

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

Recruitment and selection procedures were examined these followed Plymouth City council procedures and met this standard. All social work staff were qualified and had varying levels of experience.

The Manager said that the staff team was stable and staff confirmed that turnover was low although training opportunities for staff appeared to be minimal from what staff reported

Total number of staff of the agency:

21

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?

2

Staff said that they were well supported and received supervision in line with this standard. Staff and Managers clarified that there was a backlog of assessment awaiting processing and that it was envisaged that this would be addressed when the service re-structures. Staff and foster carers reported large case loads and link workers were difficult to access due to heavy case loads.

Foster care reviews were infrequent and minutes for those completed contained limited information

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?	2
<p>Discussions indicated that the staff team were suitably qualified and experienced in their field of work.</p> <p>The general feeling from foster carers and the team was that at the time of this inspection, the service was not sufficiently staffed to meet the demands placed upon it. There were plans for future expansion to include specific groups and develop specialist services.</p> <p>Evidence of link workers who have high caseloads and are under-resourced, was further compounded by infrequent visits to carers, missing annual reviews etc.</p> <p>It was noted at the inspection that staff and foster carers skills and experience with regard to children with disabilities is very limited and this clearly needs to be addressed through training provision.</p>		

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?	2
<p>Whilst the fostering service appears largely to be a fair and competent employer, the lack of formalised and documented carer supervision, link worker visits to the carers home and carers expressing difficulty in accessing support, the service has to improve on these areas in order to meet the standard. Support to both staff and carers needs to be prioritised.</p>		

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?	1
<p>Discussions with managers and staff established that staff induction consisted mostly of joint working. Some training was available to staff but this was limited due to financial constraints. A formalised induction and ongoing training programme for staff could not be evidenced at the inspection.</p> <p>Evidence was seen through file sampling, that some partners of primary foster carers had decided to 'opt out' of attending care training and this appears, from documentation to have been left unaddressed and unchallenged.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Staff confirmed that supervision took place monthly and that this was recorded. Staff spoken to said that they felt well supported by managers.</p> <p>An appraisal system was also in place for staff. This was operated on an annual basis. Staff meetings took place every 2 weeks for all staff these were chaired by the Manager, minutes were seen.</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?	1
<p>Feedback from foster carer questionnaires was mixed – whilst several carers felt well supported, the majority reported poor access to training, infrequent contact from link workers, lack of respite arrangements and out of hours support.</p> <p>Unallocated cases in district teams added to their feeling of isolation and frustration. Some support groups have been established, with link workers acting as facilitator for most. Attendance for these varies and the issues appear to be centred upon payments, limited support as well as poor contact from social workers in the district teams and unallocated cases.</p> <p>There was no clear strategy to address these issues beyond the proposed reorganisation</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?	1
<p>Foster care agreements seen were out of date, contained limited information and proved difficult for the link worker to adequately monitor the competence of each foster care and ultimately the appropriateness of each placement. Foster carers reported a lack of clarity around foster carer agreements and the purpose. Evidence of ongoing assessment of each foster carer by their link worker could not be provided. Link workers spoken with confirmed this was done “ informally”.</p> <p>No risk assessment, young person care plans or core assessments could be found on the files, examined. It is therefore hard to see against what both the foster care and in turn link worker, judged their performance on and ultimately the service they provide. This fact was compounded by reportedly little attempt to seek opinions from carers and no attempt to seek opinions from the young people</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?**

2

Evidence was found, through file sampling, of both good and poor attendance on training. Some carers appeared not to have attended care training despite having been registered for several years.

There was evidence, specifically of male carers not attending training.

Evidence was found where children had been placed who had very specific needs, that carers had no experience/knowledge of and no record of training provided or identified as needed. Examples of these were found for children with medical conditions, or behavioural difficulties. This also raised queries about the validity and accuracy of the matching process.

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?	1
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Of files sampled at the inspection, no details (beyond name and age) of each child placed could be evidenced. Files lacked up to date placement plans, no core assessment, care plans, LAC reviews, other professional's reports and limited LAC reviews. Clearly the nature of the placement, purpose, length and circumstances could not be found and raises concerns as to what the link worker can monitor each carer against if they do not know what each child's' needs are or what is needed from the placement.

Records regarding each child placed appear to be kept solely by the district social worker. Clearly this practice is of significant concern and leaves both carers and link workers in a vulnerable position.

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?	1
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Files sampled were incomplete and difficult to glean information from. Files did not contain a record of training attended, of the matching process, minutes of panel, dates of children being placed, on-going LAC reviews. Foster carer reviews between 1996 and 2001 were missing on all files except one. One carer appeared not to have had a review since 1999, another since 2001 and another since 2000.

No care plans or placement planning meeting minutes could be located on files sampled. Some documents were found to be unsigned and undated.

Records of carers approval numbers being increased were found without any apparent re-assessment, return to panel or other documentary evidence to support this.

Three of the four foster carer files sampled in detail were all over numbers i.e. had more children than they are approved for. There were no exemption certificates in place and absolutely nothing on file to acknowledge this fact or to record discussions between foster carers and link workers. Clearly this is of significant concern, given the limited number of files examined in detail there may be a much larger proportion of foster carers who are over numbers

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			147
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			9
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			9
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			9
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			9
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	9	Maximum £	9

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?

2

The premises used as offices by the fostering team are clearly very cramped, noisy and busy. This issue was identified by both managers and link workers alike. However, this is likely to be remedied in that the 'new' fostering team will move to Douglas House with 'adoption' remaining at the current premises. Evidence was seen of robust IT and communication systems, however whilst files are predominantly retained in cabinets – it was noted during the inspection that confidential documentation was left unsecured and lying on desks awaiting attention. The building does have a robust security system and inspectors' identification was checked and verified on several occasions.

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
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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
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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?

1

A centralised payment scheme is in place and feedback from carers was that in general, this is satisfactory although respite payments appear inevitably to be delayed to an unacceptable level

There are 3 levels at which carers can be paid – however, details of payments or payment reviews could not be evidenced on carers files.

Staff spoken to stated that an overall review of foster care payments is imminent.

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?

1

The membership of the panel was appropriate and accurate on the day of inspection. A retired social services staff member chaired it.

On the day of the inspection, the panel were observed to approve carers that they had identified as having gaps in their assessment and these were not addressed face-to-face at panel either.

Approval was granted for a particular kinship carer, without any information whatsoever on the children's progress/development whilst in the care of this relative. Again the panel recognised this deficit yet approved rather than deferred.

Kinship approvals were taking place 1-2 years after the children were placed.

One carer was challenged on some racist views they had allegedly made and the response demonstrated a complete lack of insight, sensitivity and awareness into valuing people from differing backgrounds, culture. This carer was approved (minutes taken of the panel meetings are very limited) without a recommendation.

Carers attending panel were each given a 'feedback sheet' to complete – none of those completed were seen at the inspection.

Carers with an outstanding reference and medical reference were approved, prior to receipt of the reference, rather than being deferred. A structured and robust checking process could not be evidenced in terms of the evidence available to support panel decisions.

Overall, assessments brought to panel on the day of the inspection were missing vital information and contained limited detail of historical issues for carers and changes they have made since.

Whilst the panel asked carers some questions, these were limited and left unpursued if a limited response was offered.

The panel appeared to approve carers with a note to chase references, for example, rather than ensure all information was in place and all queries answered before granting approval, the practice of the panel needs to be reviewed with some urgency and action for training.

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?
	9

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Kinship care arrangements were not inspected on this occasion although some assessments and approvals were observed at the panel.	9
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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 16th March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

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

NO

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

NO

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

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

NO

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

YES

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 PCC Fostering 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 PCC Fostering am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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