



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Bolton Social Services - Fostering

The Woodlands

Manchester Road

Bolton

BL3 2PQ

28th February, 1st, 7th & 8th March & 5th &
6th April 2005

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

Bolton Social Services - Fostering

Address

The Woodlands, Manchester Road, Bolton, BL3 2PQ

Local Authority Manager

Mr Nick Robinson

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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

November
2003

Date of Inspection Visit		28th February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Lynn O Driscoll	076931
Name of Inspector	2	Julie Bodell	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Nick Robinson	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

The stated overall aim of Bolton's fostering service is –

“To safeguard, support and promote the best interests of children, young people and their families through the provision of fostering services, which ensure stable, secure, safe and effective care for all children.”

One specific objective is to recruit locally, sufficient foster carers to provide the range of placements, including specialist placements such as for older children or those with special needs or from minority ethnic groups.

Core fostering services are provided by the Family placement Team and short break care for disabled children by Bolton Shared Care. Both services have Asian foster carers utilised by neighbouring authorities.

Each team recruits, assesses, supports, supervises and reviews foster carers. Family and friends carers are assessed and supported by district based social workers.

Support to foster carers is provided by supervising social workers and through a range of support groups. A “buddy” system is used in the assessment and post approval process for new carers. Out of hours support is provided via an on-call telephone service.

A support group for children of carers is provided by the family placement team and an experienced carer.

Representation services for fostered children are available through BYPASS, an advocacy service.

A wide range of relevant training courses are provided to staff and carers through the Department's Training Section.

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.)

Statement of Purpose

(This Standard was almost met)

The current Statement of Purpose is being updated to reflect staff changes and prior to ratification by Councillors the draft will be circulated to carers for comments.

It is recognised that the Children's Guide needs revamping and an area for development is to produce it in different formats to suit different needs.

Fitness to Provide or Manage a Fostering Service

(One Standard was met in full and one was almost met)

There are three Team Leaders within the Family Placement team, and one managing the Shared Care Scheme. All have a professional social work qualification, substantial experience of working with children and working at a senior level.

As found on previous visits, the inspectors observed the managers exercising clear and effective leadership to ensure good service delivery.

Again, without exception, staff interviewed expressed satisfaction with the accessibility, approachability, support and supervision provided by their line managers.

The carers files examined were in good order and satisfactory CRB's were seen.

The staff files held in the human resources section of the Bolton Social Service Department however need re ordering and indexing to evidence that all the legally required information has been obtained.

Management of the Fostering Service

(Both Standards were met in full)

The inspectors remain satisfied that there are clearly defined roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers.

Without exception staff were highly complimentary of the current management team of both services. They are all suitably experienced, very competent and child focussed.

The new Principal Officer responsible for children's residential services internally appointed since the last inspection has substantial child care and management expertise. He was actively involved in this inspection process which was very encouraging and he is clearly committed to continuing to develop/improve the services provided to looked after children.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

(Of the 8 Standards assessed, 3 were met in full and 5 were almost met)

There was clear documentary evidence on the carers files examined that annual inspections are undertaken to all foster homes.

At the last inspection a number of homes were purposely visited as they were accommodating children and young people over approved numbers which inevitably impacts on privacy and space. There still remains nine carers over approved numbers and a further four with exemptions. In one home there are five young people plus one who has respite. By Bolton's own standards this would be seen as large children's homes which would necessitate compliance with far more extensive Regulations.

In another home visited as part of this inspection there were four children under five. In response the new Principal Officer confirmed that all exemptions are now discussed as part of each carer's annual review and information in regard to over numbers will be provided to the Fostering and Adoption Panel every three months as part of their quality assurance responsibilities.

The young people spoken to during this inspection all said that privacy was particularly important to them yet many were sharing a bedroom and not all of the homes had second lounges. Prior to placements the fostering service should ensure "*the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there*" (Standard 6.2) and that the "*accommodation arrangements reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space*". (Standard 6.4)

Within the staff teams, both genders, disabilities, different ethnic origins, religions and professional backgrounds and personal experiences are relatively well represented. The service is equally committed to recruiting a diverse range of carers but there remains a lack of resources especially for teenagers.

Both the family placement unit and the short break service have a specific post specialising in the recruitment, training and support of Asian carers.

As on previous visits, the inspectors directly observed examples of foster carers providing excellent opportunities and support to children enabling them to pursue their individual interests and hobbies and develop their abilities. The inspectors wish to give particular recognition to a new development within the short break service since the last inspection called "*night life*" which actively encourages/ ensures older disabled young people make full use of the local facilities including night clubs.

Similarly there were good examples of carers enhancing children's confidence and feelings of self worth.

There are clear and robust child protection procedures in place including allegations against people acting in positions of trust. The Child Protection Unit collates and evaluates information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of abuse in foster care. The Family Placement and Shared Care teams are not involved in the investigations of carers thereby enabling them to offer continued support. Additional independent support is also available.

The Foster Care Agreement is very specific in respect of unacceptable forms of discipline and is emphasised in training and covered in the updated foster carer handbook. Nevertheless the inspectors were concerned as to how this is risk assessed, monitored and recorded which was discussed in detail during the feedback session with the management team. Young people stated that supervising social workers do not often speak to them in private and one identified young person did not have a field social worker which needs addressing.

An anti-bullying policy and procedural document has been produced in full collaboration with looked after children and young people and is available on request. Questionnaires and discussions with young people did identify bullying from other young people in placement with varying responses from their carers.

There is also a protocol agreed with Greater Manchester Police and a written procedure in respect of children missing from foster care which includes independent interviews on return.

The inspectors were satisfied that 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 is consistent with their safety and welfare.

The Inspectors were equally satisfied that overall the fostering service ensures looked after children and young person receive appropriate support and services to meet their physical, emotional and social needs.

Thirdly the fostering service continues to give 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.

Given the feedback from young people, (detailed below), a key area for development is for the service to ensure tangible ways of enabling children and young people to give their opinions on their carers and on how the service could be improved upon.

Recruitment, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Of the 8 Standards assessed, 1 was met in full and 7 were almost met)

There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability and delegation within the fostering service. Staff confirmed manageable workloads and regular, one to one formal supervision, conducted in private and minutes recorded. All employees have written job descriptions and contracts and access to the department's policies and procedures.

The entire management team are social work qualified, have been trained in the supervision of staff and are currently undertaking NVQ level 4 in management.

The department offers a wide range of training to both staff and carers which reflects the policies of the service but it became evident that not all carers take up these opportunities which needs addressing. The one identified member of staff must undertake child protection training.

The majority of carers who returned questionnaires and those spoken to expressed satisfaction with the training opportunities available. Two key issues were raised namely offering courses in suitable languages and the lack of crèche facilities on some courses.

Although not directly observed on this occasion, it was suggested that the preparation training needs updating/revamping. Moreover it was felt that this work was not always recognised as a fundamental part of workloads yet it entailed substantial evening and weekend work.

Overall, staff are quite satisfied with the office accommodation but it was considered short sighted not to have provided individual phone lines in the new premises. This would certainly

have been stipulated if the service had to be registered. There was also a mixed reaction to open plan working.

The inspectors remain impressed with the foster carer recruitment campaigns/strategies, based on needs analysis, and which involve existing carers and young people but the fundamental issue is that of payments. The current fee for new carers is uncompetitive and unrealistic particularly in the current market. At the last inspection one carer commented “*no-one can give up a full time job for £30 a week*” and this is still the amount being offered. During this inspection one carer had worked it out that they get 71p an hour.

The service is extremely fortunate in that they have a core of very loyal carers who are well aware of the conditions of service of local agencies but are choosing to stay with the local authority. The manager of the family placement unit stated in writing that an area for improvement is to “*systematically look at the reasons why foster carers are leaving the service via exit interviews*”. The bigger issue, however, may be the continued recruitment of new carers and is high on the agenda of the Scrutiny Committee having recently met with carers.

The vast majority of carers spoken to, and/or who returned a questionnaire were highly complimentary about the support they received from their supervising social workers as detailed below under the heading “views from carers”.

It has to be said that some of the issues requiring attention related to the lack of support and decisions made by field social workers which is not in the remit of this inspection but clearly affects outcomes and should be given due consideration by the Departmental Management Team.

Secondly although the majority of carers were satisfied with the support afforded them during office hours there was a mixed response to out of hours support.

This service has a well established support group for the sons and daughters of foster carers which was attended by the inspectors. The young people were highly appreciative of this ongoing support and felt their views were really listened to.

Records

(One Standard was met in full and one was almost met)

Separate records are kept on staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations and are all stored securely. The carers files examined were in good order but the staff files maintained in the human resources section of the Social Services Department need attention.

Secondly, as was also found at the last two inspections, on the random sample examined, there was no evidence of young people or carers adding comments to their personal files. To satisfy standard 25.12 children and carers should be encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including any dissent.

The Foster Carers’ Handbook includes the expectation that carers “*encourage the child(ren) placed to reflect on and understand her / his history according to the child’s age and ability, and keep appropriate memorabilia.*” (Standard 24.5). Clear evidence of this was seen by the inspectors during their visits.

The handbook also clearly stipulates what information carers are expected to keep securely

in their home and what information must be passed on to the fostering service and again inspectors found that the carers visited are maintaining diaries.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

This Standard was not assessed in detail on this occasion as both teams are in the process of moving to new premises.

Financial Requirements

(The one Standard assessed was almost met)

A key issue raised during this and previous inspections has been the level of fees paid to carers. Given the current market, £50 to new carers is particularly uncompetitive and unrealistic and is likely to impact on recruitment.

Foster carers receive £500 retention fee following a successful annual review and the annual foster carers' reception is another opportunity for showing recognition and appreciation of work well done but they would appreciate increased payments.

The manager wrote *"the adequacy of our payments to carers is being reviewed in various forums within the Department (eg, Scrutiny Committee, payment review meetings with carers, internal audit report)"*

The latter was undertaken last November and took into account the findings in the last inspection report. It recommended that allowances must be reviewed and any cost benefit carried out should take into account the future potential impact of agencies on Bolton MBC's recruitment of new foster carers.

Each carer is entitled to two weeks holiday without the children but this would appear to be rarely taken up and they would like the service to consider if they could choose to be paid instead. One carer who has not taken advantage of this condition of service for seventeen years also wondered if it could be back paid!

All foster carers homes now have a computer with internet access but it was raised that for an additional £3 a month they could have broadband and thereby free up their phone line.

It was also raised that payment is sometimes dependant on social workers completing movement slips so the importance of completing them promptly needs reinforcing.

Fostering Panels

(This Standard was almost met)

The service has a written policy and procedure in respect of the fostering panel in line with regulations and standards and user friendly information on the role and function of the panel including photos and pen pictures of the members.

One inspector attended the monthly Fostering and Adoption Panel which considers all assessments and approval recommendations. It was quorate and the members have a wide range of child care expertise. The chair on the day of the panel observed is a consultant paediatrician with substantial experience.

The service continues to provide ongoing training opportunities for panel members and feedback from the most recent was positive.

Established good practices include the availability of full reports prior to the meeting, and clear evidence that all members had familiarised themselves with the contents. The inspector observed the panel exercising their quality assurance function and appropriately declaring any potential conflicts of interest. As also found on previous inspections, although a formal setting all participants were enabled to fully contribute and relevant issues were thoroughly explored.

When the main business was complete, a very informative annual performance report was presented by the quality assurance officer which initiated an interesting discussion and a request for further specific information. The panel were also provided with written information about current research to keep them updated.

This fostering service also have two separate panels specifically to undertake reviews of carers to satisfy itself that “*a person remains suitable to act as a foster parent and whether or not the terms of his approval remain appropriate*” (Regulation 26(1c)). Currently carers are actively encouraged to attend, but this is not insisted upon. Consideration should be given to making attendance a much clearer expectation in the revised carer agreement. Carers have sight of all the reports to be presented to their review and to make their own written contributions.

It is an outstanding legal requirement that every “*review shall take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.*” (Regulation 29(2)). As recommended, since the last inspection a data base has been established which showed that a small number of reviews were overdue but the manager did provide specific reasons for the delays.

One observation made in respect to the main fostering and adoption panel is the importance of getting the terminology accurate. The agenda on the day read “*approval of*” and the chair during her feedback to social workers also said the panel “*approves.....*”. The service must be very clear that they can only “*recommend*” approval (Regulation 26). The final decision rests with the Director of Social Services.

The inspectors were informed that an area currently being considered is “*strengthening the concept of specialisms and a stronger division of work between fostering and adoption (permanence) –including two panels.* As part of these discussions the service is asked to consider inviting prospective carers to the panel.

Short Term Breaks (This Standard was almost met)

Bolton shared care continues to provide a flexible, needs led, short-term break service to disabled children and their families, and permanent foster carers. This is separately resourced and managed and the new manager was interviewed as part of this inspection. She is clearly child centred and competent and has developed strategies for constantly developing an already good service. Most recent is “night life” which actively encourages/ ensures older disabled young people make full use of the local facilities including night clubs. The team continue to monitor and record unmet need.

Feedback during this inspection evidences that this service remains highly valued by parents

and helps them to continue to care for their own child in the long term.

There was also clear evidence that the child's wishes are ascertained and respected in respect of any proposed placement, with gradual introductions ensuring a good match for the child and his / her carer. Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs.

Carers interviewed were very satisfied with the support and training offered by the service and the field social work team. (see details below under "views from carers")

Carers' suggested areas for improvement were the need for more staff, the provision of specialist after school and holiday clubs and increased finance to make adaptations to homes. (see details below under "views from carers")

Family and Friends as Carers

This Standard was not assessed in any depth on this occasion because the support to these carers is still provided by the field work teams who do not fall under the remit of this inspection.

Views From Carers

Views were obtained from home visits, group discussions and questionnaires.

The best things raised about the service were:

"Children's views taken seriously at reviews", "continuity", "approachability", "honesty", "organisation", "support", "good communication", "making a difference to looked after children" and "praise and recognition of my efforts".

One commented, *"we have plenty of support if needed".*

Another wrote, *"staff are friendly and approachable and genuinely caring".*

Another wrote, *"shared care is a very supportive branch of fostering services. The best thing is that it is a mutually agreed arrangement between carers and family"*

A fourth stated, *"they do an excellent job".*

A fifth wrote, *"the social workers are easily accessible. They keep in touch. Help is quickly/easily available from staff at Bolton shared care".*

One carer described the staff in the fostering service as *"dedicated and very hard working"* and *"they show great support and respect".*

Suggestions to improve the service included *"more specific guidelines in place as often this area depends on the attitude, caseload and personality of the individual social worker involved".*

One carer wrote *"most of the improvements take too long from point of awareness to implementation –sometimes things do not happen fast enough to keep pace with the rapid growth and development of the child".*

One short break carer stated *"I think there are no proper after school or holiday clubs for children who need and require one to one support either due to behaviour problems or they have disabilities".*

Another wrote *"lack of finance available to make adaptations to accommodation in order to provide more care in our own home for children who are wheelchair dependant or need hoisting, especially as often care has to be withdrawn when children get too big/ heavy to manage"*

One carer suggested that *"Christmas treats tend to be aimed at the under 12's and not at teenagers, eg: pantomimes. It would be reaching out to the disaffected young teens if they could go to a pop concert or rock gig".*

In respect to improving support for carers, one carer wrote *“every effort is made to give all round support but I do think there needs to be more funding in the emergency duty team”*.

In respect to arranging placements, one carer commented *“Social workers really try to get the matching issues right but sometimes the demand exceeds placements available.”*

When asked how well they felt supported by the service the majority answered, *“I am very satisfied”* with two exceptions who ticked *“quite well”*.

One commented, *“link workers very supportive-in regular contact”*.

Another wrote *“I know I only have to pick up the phone if I have a problem and they will respond immediately”*.

A third stated, *“I have felt supported and informed”*.

A fourth wrote *“we have found the support we have been given has always been 100% and any problems/concerns have been dealt with, with compassion and a great deal of care ”*

Those who returned questionnaires felt the staff were good at letting them know things concerning the children placed and consulted about important decisions.

Some, however, did not feel adequately informed about the children’s backgrounds. One carer wrote, *“sometimes there is a lack of background on children’s history when first placed”*. Another comment was *“only on a few occasions the history has not been great, but as soon as more is known we are told”*.

They confirmed attendance at reviews and are listened to.

They also confirmed receipt of written information setting out the Department’s expectations of carers and on punishments.

Not all carers, however, had received information on how to complain.

Carers also raised the difficulties of gaining parental permission on certain issues for example obtaining a passport.

Recent training has included child protection, fire safety, drug awareness, education needs of looked after children, attachment and identity, working with families, mind your back, stress awareness, peg feeding, epilepsy, understanding behaviour, communicating with children, first aid and NVQ level 3. One carer wrote *“the training given and information and advice is very truthful and beneficial”*

When asked if they felt the service was sufficiently staffed the majority answered *“no”*. One carer wrote, *“There will never be enough money to pay enough staff. I think the staff we have do the best job they can with the resources”*.

Another wrote, *“I think the staff at shared care do an excellent job but could probably do with more staff “*.

A third wrote that *“link workers are under pressure due to staff shortages”*

An area for continued development is to proactively seek carers’ opinions about the way the service runs. Only four carers who returned a questionnaire were satisfied with this through for example, support groups, recruitment meetings and reviews.

It is also quite evident that kinship carers are not receiving the same support and training opportunities as other carers.

One carer added the following comments to the end of the questionnaire, *“constant lines of*

communication are open, telephone calls always returned as soon as possible, support there when needed, always a great respect for my opinions shown, treated as an equal"

Another carer concluded "Bolton Social Services is committed to making improvements and getting it right. It will never be perfect but at least the aim is in the right direction. I do not support change for the sake of change which can often have us going round in circles so I welcome the fact that changes over the last 6 or 7 years have brought significant improvements".

A third carer wrote "The pay and support in the private sector (ie: agencies) is known to be much better than in the government sector. Nevertheless, I believe Social Services and other children's services are offering the best they can with the resources they have available to them and deserve recognition and loyalty from such as myself.

Since the recognition that education, health, leisure etc all have a part to play in the corporate parenting of the foster children ideas and responsibilities have been shared in a way that has led to genuine improvements for their welfare in general."

Views of Children and Young People

Views were obtained from home visits, group discussions and questionnaires.

Leisure activities young people engage in include playing out and going on trips, bike rides, football, horse riding, arts and crafts, drama, dance, singing, going to the caravan, swimming, wrestling, tai chi and the Bolton lads and girls club.

Punishments include being grounded, *"going to bedroom to think"*, *"talking about how I am going to behave"*, confiscation of mobile phone, reduction of pocket money and getting told off. All the young people who responded thought these were fair with the exception of the phone and spending money.

Two young people confirmed that they were *"often asked"* by their carers about their opinions and ideas. Another four ticked *"they ask me sometimes"*. Examples given were what they would like to eat and play, choice of activities and clothes, seeing family, changes to bedroom and colour schemes in the house.

In answering what has changed because of what s/he said, one wrote, *"I asked for my bedroom to be more grown up and now it is cool"*.

Another wrote *"one of the other children wasn't being very nice to me.....and it has been sorted out."*

A third wrote *"They stopped giving me a lot of potatoes because I did not like them"*.

Only 50% who returned questionnaires confirmed in writing that the fostering service ask their opinions about the carers, and the majority were not asked about how the service could be improved upon which needs addressing.

One ticked that their field social worker *"often"* sees him on his own to ascertain his opinions but all the rest ticked *"sometimes."* One young person had written *"occasionally"*

Another area for attention is that not all the young person who returned a questionnaire had a copy of the Children's Guide.

All except two knew how to complain if ever they need to but not how to get in touch with the Commission.

The responses to the worst thing about fostering included, *"being different from my friends and worrying they will find out I am fostered"*.

"Sometimes the other children can be a bit nasty to me but [name of carers] sort it out for me".

"I would rather be with my mum"

"Sometimes I am bullied by the other child"

"coming in early"

"not allowed to have a motorbike" and

"CRB having to be done".

One young person said the best thing about fostering was that *"I feel safe. I enjoy everything we do together. I can talk to my carers. They listen to me."*

Another wrote *"I get to do lots of fun things. I feel more than happy at my foster home and very safe. They always listen to me".*

Another wrote *"{name of carers} love me a lot and playing with all the children"*

Another wrote *"I like my foster carer"*

One young person concluded, *"everything is fine"*

Another wrote *"I think the fostering service look after and listen to me really well. I think they have made the right decisions for me and my future".*

Another added, *"everyone listens and looks after me really really really really really well".*

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:

There is one legal requirement outstanding from the previous inspection and a further eight made during this inspection.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Lynn O'Driscoll</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Julie Bodell</u>	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	<u>Ian Jeavons</u>	Signature	_____
Date	<u>28 April 2005</u>		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	4	FS1	The service must review and revise the Statement of Purpose and forward an amended copy to the Commission	5/7/05
2	3 (4)	FS1	The service must provide a copy of the children's guide to each child placed.	5/5/05
3	20 Schedule 1	FS3	Staff files must include all the required information as specified in Schedule 1	5/6/05
4	20	FS9	The identified member of staff must undertaken suitable training in child protection	5/7/05
5	13	FS9	The service must tighten up their monitoring procedures to ensure all forms of discipline are not excessive/unreasonable and bullying is identified and appropriately responded to.	Details to be forwarded with the action plan
6	20	FS16	The service must tighten up on the monitoring of carers attending training and support groups to ensure they are all up to date on current legislation and recognised good practices.	Details to be forwarded with the action plan
7	17	FS22	Carers must be provided with written information on how to make a complaint should this be necessary.	6/6/05

8	29	FS30	Reviews must be undertaken at the required frequencies. This is an outstanding legal requirement from the last inspection.	<i>“not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.”</i>
9	26	FS30	The service must be very clear in all their written information and during feedback that the panel can only “ <i>recommend</i> ” approval.	6/5/05

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	An area for attention is to produce the Children’s Guide in a range of formats to meet the differing needs of children/young people
2	FS3	The staff files held in the human resources section of the Bolton Social Service Department should be re ordered and indexed to clearly show that all the legally required information has been obtained.
3	FS6	Prior to every placement the fostering service should ensure “ <i>the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there</i> ” and that the “ <i>accommodation arrangements reflect the child’s assessed need for privacy and space</i> ”.
4	FS6	The fostering service agreed to clarify the arrangements with the transport section in respect to carers undertaking the test to drive the Department’s people carriers as delays were reported.
5	FS7	The training for carers should be provided in the specific language best suited to meet their needs.

6	FS7	The longer term moving and handling needs of young people accessing the shared care scheme should be given due consideration at referral stage in an attempt to avoid unnecessary ending of placements.
7	FS8	The service should reinforce to their field work colleagues the responsibility to ensure all the necessary information is available to carers preferably prior to, or at the point of admission.
8	FS8	The service should consider including the suggested additions to their Foster Care Agreement.
9	FS9	Given the feedback from young people the service should ensure tangible ways of enabling children and young people to give their opinions on their carers and on how the service could be improved upon.
10	FS15	There should be clear documentary evidence on all staff files of telephone enquiries to follow up written references and the completion of a satisfactory probationary period.
11	FS16	The management team of the family placement unit should directly observe, review and as necessary revise and update the preparation group training.
12	FS17	The Department should give serious consideration to increasing the payments to carers.
13	FS19	The service should consider whether the expectation that carers' undertake ongoing training should form part of the foster care agreement.
14	FS22	The supervisory visit pro forma should be used consistently
15	FS25	Children and carers should be encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including any dissent.
16	FS29	Carers would like the service to consider the choice of two weeks payment rather than a holiday and the provision of broadband.
17	FS29	The service should reinforce the importance of promptly completing movement slips as this affects when carers' get paid.
18	FS30	Consideration should be given to making attendance at carer reviews an expectation in the revised foster care agreement
19	FS30	The service is asked to consider inviting prospective carers to the fostering panel.

20	FS11	An area for continued development is to proactively seek carers' opinions about the way the service runs

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

PART B	INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS
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The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	6
Survey of placing authorities	NA
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NA
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	NA
• 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	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	28/2/05
Time of Inspection	9AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	58.75

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

A Statement of Purpose is in place and available on request but it requires updating. The management Team confirmed that prior to ratification by elected members the draft will be distributed to carers for their comments.

A Children's Guide is in place but it is recognised that it would benefit from revamping and an area for development is to produce the guide in different formats to suit different needs. From questionnaires received it is evident that all looked after children do not have a personal copy which needs addressing. Consequently they also did not know how to contact the Commission.

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
<p>Since the last inspection the service has successfully recruited to the vacant part time team leader post in the family placement unit and a new manager appointed to the Shared Care Scheme.</p> <p>There are three Team Leaders within the Family Placement team, and one managing the Shared Care Scheme. All have a professional social work qualification, substantial experience of working with children and working at a senior level.</p> <p>To satisfy Standard 2.2 which states that managers in the fostering services have a <i>qualification at NVQ Level 4 in management, or another qualification which matches the competences required by the NVQ Level 4 by 2005</i> all have commenced this qualification since the last inspection and the intended completion date is June 2005.</p> <p>As found on previous inspections the inspectors observed the managers exercising clear and effective leadership to ensure good service delivery.</p> <p>Again, without exception, staff interviewed expressed satisfaction with the accessibility, approachability, support and supervision provided by their line managers.</p>		

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?****2**

This inspection included examination of a sample of staff files at the human resources section of the Bolton Social Services Department. It proved difficult to find the required information as the files were found to be in disarray. They were not in chronological order or indexed.

Only one had a photograph. On another file only one written reference was seen and on two files there was no documentary evidence of qualifications. One employment history was not in sufficient detail. These are all legally required.

There was also no evidence that telephone enquiries are made to follow up references on successful candidates to satisfy Standard 3.2.

In sharp contrast the carers files examined which are maintained by the fostering service, were in good order and satisfactory CRB's were seen.

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

Registered fostering services are required under Regulation 42 to maintain a monitoring system and the Commission consider it a matter of good practice that Local Authority services do likewise.

In response the quality assurance team provided an annual performance report to the fostering panel in February and the manager of the family placement team has produced a monitoring report in respect to Schedule 7 and has identified actions for improvement.

The inspectors remain satisfied that there are clearly defined roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers.

Financial procedures are managed by the department's Finance Section and subject to local government processes and audit.

Professional fees and allowances for children and young people are documented and available on request but as highlighted in previous reports, serious consideration should be given to increasing them. (see Standards 17 and 29 for more details)

The department has a code of practice for staff in respect of conflicts of interest, and this was observed in practice on two occasions at the Fostering and Adoption Panel which was attended as part of the inspection process.

The Foster Carers' Handbook also includes carers' responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

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

X

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.

0

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 CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:	0
Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:	0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)		
The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>This Standard continues to be met in full and good practice found.</p> <p>Since the last inspection the part time team leader vacancy in the family placement unit has been filled and a new manager appointed for Bolton Shared Care. Both are suitably experienced, very competent and child focussed. Staff described them as <i>“very accessible and approachable”</i></p> <p>The new Principal Officer responsible for children’s residential services internally appointed since the last inspection has substantial child care and management expertise. He was actively involved in this inspection process which was very encouraging and he is clearly committed to continuing to develop/improve the services provided to looked after children.</p> <p>Without exception staff were highly complimentary of the current management team of both services.</p> <p>All managers confirmed they have accurate and up to date job descriptions, and lines of accountability are clearly defined.</p>		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>There was clear documentary evidence on the carers files examined that annual inspections are undertaken to all foster homes which includes completion of a health and safety checklist. Up to date risk assessments were also seen. Health and Safety guidelines are included in the Foster Carer's Handbook and training is provided.</p>		
<p>At the last inspection a number of homes were purposely visited as they were accommodating children and young people over approved numbers which inevitably impacts on privacy and space. There still remains nine carers over approved numbers and a further four with exemptions. In one home there are five young people plus one who has respite. By Bolton's own standards this would be seen as a large children's home which would necessitate compliance with far more extensive Regulations.</p>		
<p>In another home visited as part of this inspection there were four children under five. As recommended these are now being more closely monitored and regularly reviewed by the fostering panel as part of their quality assurance responsibilities.</p>		
<p>The young people spoken to during this inspection all said that privacy was particularly important to them yet many were sharing a bedroom and not all of the homes had second lounges. Prior to placements the fostering service should ensure "<i>the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there</i>" (Standard 6.2) and that the "<i>accommodation arrangements reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space</i>". (Standard 6.4)</p>		
<p>Carers spoken to reported frustration with the delays in undertaking the test to drive the Department's people carrier resulting in them having to make alternative arrangements. The management team agreed to clarify this with the transport section of the Social Services Department.</p>		
<p>Carers confirmed a prompt response to requests for equipment but remain dissatisfied with the choice and quality of the furniture offered. During the feedback session the management team confirmed their intention to trial another company.</p>		

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Bolton has a policy throughout all Departments of valuing diversity which is reflected in the recruitment of staff and carers. A Fairness Team has oversight of developments.

Within the service, both genders, disabilities, different ethnic origins, religions and professional backgrounds and personal experiences are relatively well represented.

Bolton is actively committed to recruiting a diverse range of carers and there was clear evidence that the specific needs of individual children are recognised and respected.

Bolton Shared Care provides a flexible, needs led short term care service to disabled children and their families. There was also continued evidence of the Department providing equipment and adaptations to meet specific needs but other carers raised the issue of some placements having to end when young people get too big/heavy.

The inspectors wish to give particular recognition to a new development within this service since the last inspection called "*night life*" which actively encourages/ ensures older disabled young people make full use of the local facilities including night clubs.

Both services have a specific post specialising in the recruitment, training and support of Asian carers. A recognised area for attention is providing training in Urdu and a real disappointment highlighted was that a recent celebration day was organised for a Friday. The inspectors were assured that this would never happen again.

As on previous visits, the inspectors directly observed examples of foster carers providing excellent opportunities and support to children enabling them to pursue their individual interests and hobbies and develop their abilities.

Similarly there were good examples of carers enhancing children's confidence and feelings of self worth and this role is specifically covered in the following courses- Attachment and Identity, Promoting Literacy and Numeracy, Working with Children who have lived with Domestic Violence, and Communicating with Children.

Anti discriminatory practice is covered in all the training.

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 fostering and adoption panel continue to give very careful attention to matching and ensuring services are in place to cover specific needs identified.

In the majority of cases examined, placements were observed to meet quite specific assessed needs and some excellent matches were evidenced.

The fundamental issue remains the lack of resources especially for teenagers resulting in over numbers which in turn impacts on privacy and space. In respect to arranging placements, one carer commented "*Social workers really try to get the matching issues right but sometimes the demand exceeds placements available.*" In response the new Principal Officer confirmed that all exemptions are now discussed as part of each carer's annual review and information in regard to over numbers will be provided to the Fostering and Adoption Panel every three months.

The Bolton Shared Care Team maintain a record of "*unmet need*" which is closely monitored.

During the feedback session the management team were made aware that carers had reported that on some planned admissions they were still not receiving all the necessary documentation at the point of admission.

Following the last inspection the Foster Care Agreement has been amended in line with Schedule 5. This was scrutinised by the inspectors and additions to ensure clarity were suggested.

Since the last inspection the foster placement agreements now contain specific reference to matching and details of any additional support needed to compensate for any gaps in the match.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There are clear and robust child protection procedures in place including allegations against people acting in positions of trust.

The Child Protection Unit collates and evaluates information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of abuse in foster care. There have been five enquiries since the last Inspection, which were all investigated and clear outcomes reached.

The Family Placement and Shared Care teams are not involved in the investigations of carers thereby enabling them to be able to offer continued support. Additional independent support is also available.

Ongoing training for carers includes safe caring and managing behaviour which form part of the "core skills" and they are offered in the day and evenings with crèche facilities. Expenses are paid. An identified area for attention is to offer key training in the language best suited to meet the needs of the carers.

Carers can also attend the courses put on by the area child protection committee which include children in need and ethnic minority, child concern awareness, recognition and response, suicide and self harm and child concern and the disabled child. These run in the evenings and day time for people from a mixture of work and care settings but there is no crèche available.

The service also offer an ongoing course for young people who have witnessed domestic violence.

There was one identified member of staff who had not undertaken the mandatory child protection training which must be given priority attention.

Principles of safe caring are covered in preparation groups, included in the assessment process and detailed in the handbook.

The Foster Care Agreement is very specific in respect of unacceptable forms of discipline and is emphasised in training and covered in the updated foster carer handbook. Nevertheless the inspectors were concerned as to how this is risk assessed, monitored and recorded which was discussed in detail during the feedback session with the management team. Young people stated that supervising social workers do not often speak to them in private and one identified young person did not have a field social worker which needs addressing.

An anti-bullying policy and procedural document has been produced in full collaboration with looked after children and young people and is available on request. Questionnaires and discussions with young people did identify bullying from other young people in placement with varying responses from their carers.

Moreover the majority of young people felt that the service did not regularly ask them their opinions about the carers or on how to improve the service which is a fundamental

safeguard.

There is a protocol agreed with Greater Manchester Police and a written procedure in respect of children missing from foster care which includes independent interviews on return. Statistics are collated by the quality assurance team.

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

This Standard was met in full and good practice found.

The handbook contains a section on the importance of promoting contact, and contact arrangements were clear on individual files. These are regularly monitored, reviewed and revised according to the child's / young person's needs. Risk assessments were in place.

Inspectors were impressed with the carers they met and/or who returned a questionnaire as part of this inspection, as they clearly go to great lengths to actively promote, support and maintain positive contact, consistent with the child's welfare. Carers confirmed that any costs are reimbursed by the fostering service.

The inspectors also found clear evidence of the views of children / young people being sought and actively listened to in respect of contact arrangements.

The carers visited were completing diaries including the outcomes of contact arrangements and their perceived impact on the child in line with the standards.

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?

2

The course entitled Care Planning and the Foster Care Role includes the importance of listening and responding to children's views.

Two young people who returned questionnaires confirmed that they were "often asked" by their carers about their opinions and ideas. Another four ticked "they ask me sometimes". Examples given were what they would like to eat and play, choice of activities and clothes, seeing family, changes to bedroom and colour schemes in the house.

In answering what has changed because of what s/he said, one wrote, "I asked for my bedroom to be more grown up and now it is cool".

Another wrote "one of the other children wasn't being very nice to me.....and it has been

sorted out.

A third wrote *"They stopped giving me a lot of potatoes because I did not like them"*.

Good practice includes young people being actively involved in recruitment drives and corporate consultation events which have led to the provision of computers and leisure passes for all looked after children/ young people. The review and update of the current health policy also involved looked after children as did the significant improvements made to the statutory review system. Unfortunately since the last inspection this group of looked after young people who met regularly with Bypass an independent advocacy service to explore issues relating to being in foster care has been disbanded.

The Foster Carer Review format includes the views of all children placed within the 12 month period subject to review. They are actively encouraged to attend their own reviews and/or an advocate will accompany them/speak on their behalf, if they prefer.

An area for attention is to ensure all young people in foster care have a copy of the Children's Guide which is a legal requirement. They would then know of their right to and how to contact the Commission direct should they need to. Not all the young people who returned a questionnaire knew how to complain which again must be included by law in the Children's Guide.

Only 50% who returned questionnaires confirmed in writing that the fostering service ask their opinions about the carers, and the majority were not asked about how the service could be improved upon which needs addressing. Without blurring the roles, supervising social workers should be speaking to children placed to ascertain their views during their visits. There may also be a role here for the quality assurance team.

Similarly, an area for continued development is to proactively seek carers' opinions about the way the service runs. Only four carers who returned a questionnaire were satisfied with this through for example, support groups, recruitment meetings and reviews.

The Inspectors were informed that it also remains the Department's aim to further develop consultation opportunities for parents. This currently includes written views at carer annual reviews and attendance and participation in statutory reviews.

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

This Standard was met in full and good practice found.

A policy on promoting the Health of Looked After Children is available on request.

Questionnaires from young people confirmed that carers *"give me a lot of healthy food and not a lot of junk food"*, *"I get a variety of fruit and vegetables"* *"I am fed healthily and have regular showers and washes"* *"they make sure I have brushed my teeth, had a wash and breakfast. They also make sure I eat lots of fruit and veg"* and *"They make sure I know about personal hygiene"*.

A LAC Nurse is in post and a mental health support worker who will work alongside the clinical psychologist as part of the overall plan to develop the CAMHS service to children and young people looked after. This will include base line emotional health screening for new admissions to care.

The designated health advisor for looked after children is piloting a scheme called the *"healthy homes initiative"* which is currently aimed at all the residential childrens' homes but eventually all carers will be expected to ensure their own homes reach the standards of health awareness and promotion as detailed in the pack. This will be explored at the next inspection.

The carers' handbook has a specific section on health issues and as recommended at the last inspection the carers' role as advocate has been expanded upon.

The diaries examined during this inspection provided evidence that carers are now recording medical appointments and one child visited who has recently had an assessment was found to have *"met milestones over and above expectations"*

Carers confirmed access to training opportunities, general and specific, including health and hygiene, drug/alcohol awareness, peg feeding, epilepsy, sexual health and first aid courses.

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

This Standard was met in full and the outcome reached.

Statistics provided as part of the pre inspection information showed that as of 12th December 2004 there were no foster children off roll and the Education Achievement Fund receives increased nominations from social workers and carers.

The joint education and social services panel is well established and is currently considering the Audit Commission's Report on educational achievements of looked after children. Since the last inspection there has been a successful bid through academic mentoring to get mentoring for looked after young people in year 10.

Funding has also been secured to develop a scheme to improve GCSE results.

The "Right to Read" group has been running for the last twelve months which is part of a project enabling books and resources to be accessed by carers and young people.

The Corporate Children's Officer continues to develop corporate work placement schemes, and since the last inspection the rolling programme has ensured that every foster home has now been provided with a computer with e-mail and internet access. A website has been launched www.plodge.org.uk which will eventually include key information such as personal education plans (pep's) which young people and their carers will be able to complete online. The Inspectors were informed that there is a review in progress in respect to pep's which will include consultation with young people, carers and other stakeholders.

In March 2004 150 delegates attended a conference entitled "Making a difference-a joined up approach to the education of looked after children" resulting in specific task groups to take forward the agreed action plan.

As recommended, individual foster placement agreements now clearly state who is responsible for specific school costs and the foster carer handbook has a new section on expectations on carers when children and young people are not in school. Education continues to be a key area discussed in statutory reviews.

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?**

0

"0" denotes Standard not assessed in detail on this occasion.

This Standard was met in full at the last inspection.

Pre inspection information from the Manager stated that, "The After Care Service in Bolton has been recently reorganised to develop higher quality services. All young people aged 16 are now allocated to a qualified After Care worker. Prior to this, assessments are carried out to develop a Pathway Plan".

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

Recruitment and selection procedures are in place but the files maintained at the human resources section of the social services department did not include all the information as required to fully assess this Standard and outcome. (see Standard 3 for more details) There was, for example, no written evidence that telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references.

The inspectors were informed that all the staff in the service are social work qualified with the exception of the Asian link workers, but again, documentary evidence was not on all the files examined.

Thirdly new staff are subject to a six month probationary period but on the files examined there was no paperwork to confirm this had been satisfactory *“following a final interview”* as is the Department’s specified procedure.

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?

2

There is a clear management structure and lines of accountability and delegation within the fostering service. Staff confirmed manageable workloads and regular, one to one formal supervision, conducted in private and minutes recorded. All employees have written job descriptions and contracts and access to the department's policies and procedures.

The entire management team are social work qualified and have extensive child care experience. They are noticeably visible, approachable and supportive which was particularly appreciated by staff.

All the managers have been trained in the supervision of staff and are currently undertaking NVQ level 4 in management.

There was clear evidence that there is an ongoing training programme available for both staff and carers but it became evident that not all carers take up these opportunities which needs addressing.

Although not directly observed on this occasion, it was suggested that the preparation training needs updating/revamping. Moreover it was felt that this work was not always recognised as a fundamental part of workloads yet it entailed substantial evening and weekend work.

The one identified member of staff must undertake child protection training.

Overall, staff are quite satisfied with the office accommodation but it was considered short sighted not to have provided individual phone lines in the new premises. This would certainly have been stipulated if the service had to be registered. There was also a mixed reaction to open plan working. The family placement team are looking forward to the commencement of a new administrator.

Interviews with staff confirmed they understood their own role and that of field social workers, and the importance of working together effectively.

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

The part time Team Leader vacancy and the specialist post in the family placement unit have both been successfully filled since the last inspection.

The inspectors remain impressed with the foster carer recruitment campaigns/strategies, based on needs analysis, and which involve existing carers and young people but the fundamental issue is that of payments. The current fee for new carers is uncompetitive and unrealistic particularly in the current market. At the last inspection one carer commented “*no-one can give up a full time job for £30 a week*” and this is still the amount being offered. During this inspection one carer had worked it out that they get 71p an hour.

The service is extremely fortunate in that they have a core of very loyal carers who are well aware of the conditions of service of local agencies but are choosing to stay with the local authority. One wrote, “*The pay and support in the private sector (ie: agencies) is known to be much better than in the government sector. Nevertheless, I believe Social Services and other children’s services are offering the best they can with the resources they have available to them and deserve recognition and loyalty from such as myself.*”

The manager of the family placement unit stated in writing that an area for improvement is to “*systematically look at the reasons why foster carers are leaving the service via exit interviews*”. The bigger issue, however, may be the continued recruitment of new carers and is high on the agenda of the Scrutiny Committee having recently met with carers. (see also Standards 4 and 29)

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

The vast majority of carers spoken to, and/or who returned a questionnaire were highly complimentary about the support they received from their supervising social workers.

Comments/ written responses included;

“we have plenty of support if needed”.

“shared care is a very supportive branch of fostering services.”

“Help is quickly/ easily available from staff at Bolton shared care”.

“link workers very supportive-in regular contact”.

“I know I only have to pick up the phone if I have a problem and they will respond immediately”.

“I have felt supported and informed”.

“we have found the support we have been given has always been 100% and any problems/concerns have been dealt with, with compassion and a great deal of care ”

“constant lines of communication are open, telephone calls always returned as soon as possible, support there when needed, always a great respect for my opinions shown, treated as an equal”

It has to be said that some of the issues requiring attention related to the lack of support and decisions made by field social workers which is not in the remit of this inspection but clearly affects outcomes and should be given due consideration by the Departmental Management Team.

The majority of carers were satisfied with the support afforded them during office hours but as found at the last inspection, there was a mixed response to out of hours support.

In respect to improving support for carers, one carer wrote *“every effort is made to give all round support but I do think there needs to be more funding in the emergency duty team”.*

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?****2**

The department offers a wide range of training to both staff and carers which reflects the policies of the service.

Joint training available includes all the Area Child Protection courses, Managing Challenging Behaviour, HIV Awareness, Drug and Alcohol Awareness and Communicating with Children. Recent training for carers has included fire safety, education needs of looked after children, attachment and identity, working with families, mind your back, stress awareness, peg feeding, epilepsy, first aid and NVQ level 3. One carer wrote *“the training given and information and advice is very truthful and beneficial*

Training and development needs of carers are discussed at annual reviews and with supervising social workers during monthly visits but it still became evident that not all are taking up the courses on offer. The service should consider whether ongoing training should form part of the foster care agreement.

Individual supervision sessions and Personal Development Plans identify training and development needs of staff. One identified member of staff must undertake the mandatory child protection training.

The majority of carers who returned questionnaires and those spoken to expressed satisfaction with the training opportunities available. Two key issues were raised namely offering courses in suitable languages and the lack of crèche facilities on some courses. Many are offered at weekends and evenings and expenses are reimbursed. Participants are asked to complete evaluation sheets at the end of every course for quality assurance purposes.

Examination of support group minutes provided clear evidence that carers are kept up to date with changes in legislation and current guidance's but it was also evident that not all attend.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

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

This Standard continues to be met in full

All staff receive regular, formal supervision and are expected to attend fortnightly staff meetings. The personal development plan incorporates annual staff appraisals.

Records of team meetings and supervision sessions are maintained.

Job descriptions are in place and staff have access to all the Department's Policies and Procedures.

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?****0**

“0” denotes not assessed on this occasion.

This Standard was met in full at the last inspection.

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**

Since the last inspection the Foster Care Agreement has been updated to include all the particulars specified in Schedule 5. This was scrutinised by the inspectors and some additions suggested to provide further clarity.

All foster carers are supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and those interviewed confirmed satisfaction with the office hours support provided by their current supervising social workers. There was clear documentary evidence that visits to carers homes are regularly undertaken, including unannounced visits, but, as was also found at the last inspection, the pro forma for recording supervisory visits to foster carers' homes is still not being used consistently.

There is a complaints procedure in place and available on request but not all carers who returned a questionnaire said they knew how to complain should they ever need to which must be addressed.

Child protection procedures are in place and known to carers and staff. Records are appropriately maintained. Training is available to carers and the service buy in independent support to foster carers during an investigation which is recognised good practice.

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

Existing carers are involved in pre-approval sessions with prospective carers, which is recognised good practice. Since the last inspection the equipment and materials used have been updated as recommended but it was still suggested that the further improvements could be made. (see Standard 16)

All new foster carers receive induction training. Where two adults in the household are approved, both must successfully complete all training.

Training on safe care is provided to all carers with guidance included in the handbooks. Safe caring publications from the Shared Care Network are given to short break carers.

This service has a well established support group for the sons and daughters of foster carers which was attended by the inspectors. The young people were highly appreciative of this ongoing support and felt their views were really listened to.

Each carer's annual review includes an appraisal of training and development needs which is clearly documented in the review report.

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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This Standard was met in full

There is a policy on case recording available on request, a good practice leaflet, and an index showing exactly what should be on a carer's file and on a child's / young person's file.

The foster carers interviewed were clear about why the children/young people were placed with them and the intended duration of the placement.

The Foster Carers' Handbook includes the expectation that carers "*encourage the child(ren) placed to reflect on and understand her / his history according to the child's age and ability, and keep appropriate memorabilia.*" (Standard 24.5). Clear evidence of this was seen by the inspectors during their visits.

The handbook also clearly stipulates what information carers are expected to keep securely in their home and what information must be passed on to the fostering service and again inspectors found that the carers visited are maintaining diaries.

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?	2
<p>Separate records are kept on staff, carers, children, complaints and allegations. The carers files examined were in good order but the staff files maintained in the human resources section of the Social Services Department need attention. (see Standards 3 and 15)</p> <p>In respect of young people's files the department uses the Looking After Children documentation.</p> <p>All confidential records are stored securely. There is a policy and procedural document on the retention of case files and one relating to access, but, as also found at the last two inspections, on the random sample examined, there was no evidence of young people or carers adding comments to their personal files. To satisfy standard 25.12 children and carers should be encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including any dissent.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			X
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 £	30	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?

0

“0” denotes not assessed in detail on this occasion as both teams are in the process of moving to new premises.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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“0” denotes not assessed on this occasion.

This Standard was met in full at the last inspection

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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“0” denotes not assessed on this occasion.

This Standard was met in full at the last inspection.

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?

2

A key issue raised during this and previous inspections has been the level of fees paid to carers. Given the current market, £30 to new carers is particularly uncompetitive and unrealistic and is likely to impact on recruitment.

Foster carers receive £500 retention fee following a successful annual review and the annual foster carers' reception is another opportunity for showing recognition and appreciation of work well done but they would appreciate increased payments. (see Standards 4 and 17 for more details)

The manager wrote *"the adequacy of our payments to carers is being reviewed in various forums within the Department (eg, Scrutiny Committee, payment review meetings with carers, internal audit report)"*

The latter was undertaken last November and took into account the findings in the last inspection report. It recommended that allowances must be reviewed and any cost benefit carried out should take into account the future potential impact of agencies on Bolton MBC's recruitment of new foster carers.

Each carer is entitled to two weeks holiday without the children but this would appear to be rarely taken up and they would like the service to consider if they could choose to be paid instead. One carer who has not taken advantage of this condition of service for seventeen years also wondered if it could be back paid!

All foster carers homes now have a computer with internet access but it was raised that for an additional £3 a month they could have broadband and thereby free up their phone line.

It was also raised that payment is sometimes dependant on social workers completing movement slips so the importance of completing them promptly needs reinforcing.

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?

2

The service has a written policy and procedure in respect of the fostering panel in line with regulations and standards and user friendly information on the role and function of the panel including photos and pen pictures of the members.

One inspector attended the monthly Fostering and Adoption Panel which considers all assessments and approval recommendations. It was quorate and the members have a wide range of child care expertise. The chair, on the day of the panel observed, is a consultant paediatrician with substantial experience.

The service continues to provide ongoing training opportunities for panel members and feedback from the most recent was positive.

Established good practices include the availability of full reports prior to the meeting, and clear evidence that all members had familiarised themselves with the contents. The inspector observed the panel exercising their quality assurance function and appropriately declaring any potential conflicts of interest. As also found on previous inspections, although a formal setting all participants were enabled to fully contribute and relevant issues were thoroughly explored.

When the main business was complete, a very informative annual performance report was presented by the quality assurance officer which initiated an interesting discussion and a request for further specific information. The panel were also provided with written information about current research to keep them updated.

This fostering service also have two separate panels specifically to undertake reviews of carers to satisfy itself that *“a person remains suitable to act as a foster parent and whether or not the terms of his approval remain appropriate”* (Regulation 26(1c)). Currently carers are actively encouraged to attend, but this is not insisted upon. Consideration should be given to making attendance a much clearer expectation in the revised carer agreement. Carers have sight of all the reports to be presented to their review and to make their own written contributions.

It is an outstanding legal requirement that every *“review shall take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.”* (Regulation 29(2)). As recommended, since the last inspection a data base has been established which showed that a small

number of reviews were overdue but the manager did provide specific reasons for the delays.

One observation made in respect to the main fostering and adoption panel is the importance of getting the terminology accurate. The agenda on the day read “*approval of*” and the chair during her feedback to social workers also said the panel “*approves.....*”. The service must be very clear that they can only “*recommend*” approval (Regulation 26). The final decision rests with the Director of Social Services.

The inspectors were informed that an area currently being considered is “*strengthening the concept of specialisms and a stronger division of work between fostering and adoption (permanence) –including two panels*”. As part of these discussions the service is asked to consider inviting prospective carers to the panel.

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

Bolton shared care continues to provide a flexible, needs led, short-term break service to disabled children and their families, and permanent foster carers. This is separately resourced and managed and the new manager was interviewed as part of this inspection. She is clearly child centred and competent and has developed strategies for constantly developing an already good service. Most recent is "night life" which actively encourages/ ensures older disabled young people make full use of the local facilities including night clubs. The team continue to monitor and record unmet need.

Feedback during this inspection evidences that this service remains highly valued by parents and helps them to continue to care for their own child in the long term.

There was also clear evidence that the child's wishes are ascertained in respect of any proposed placement, with gradual introductions, ensuring a good match for the child and his / her carer. Birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs.

Carers interviewed were very satisfied with the support and training offered by the service and the field social work team. One wrote, *"shared care is a very supportive branch of fostering services. The best thing is that it is a mutually agreed arrangement between carers and family"*

Another wrote, *"the social workers are easily accessible. They keep in touch. Help is quickly/ easily available from staff at Bolton shared care"*.

When asked how the service could be improved upon one short break carer stated *"I think there are no proper after school or holiday clubs for children who need and require one to one support either due to behaviour problems or they have disabilities"*.

Another wrote *"lack of finance available to make adaptations to accommodation in order to provide more care in our own home for children who are wheelchair dependant or need hoisting, especially as often care has to be withdrawn when children get too big/ heavy to manage"*

A significant number of questionnaires also raised the need for more staff. One carer wrote *"I think the staff at shared care do an excellent job but could probably do with more staff"*.

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?	0
<p>This standard was not assessed in any depth as the support to kinship carers is still provided by the field work teams who do not fall under the remit of this inspection.</p> <p>The Manager of the fostering service wrote <i>“currently 20% of all placements are made with family and friends carers”</i> and <i>“two specific posts have been agreed (within the family placement unit) to develop these services”</i> At the feedback session the inspectors were informed that they have now short listed.</p> <p>The Commission would anticipate that this service will be established by the next inspection and would therefore intend to make this a major theme.</p> <p>A policy and procedural document entitled <i>“Foster Placements with Friends and Relatives”</i> is available on request.</p>		

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 28 February, 1/7/8 March & 5/6 April 2005, and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 26 May 2005 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

Action plan was received at the point of publication

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

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of Bolton MBC - 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 Bolton MBC - 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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