



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

**Ethelbert Residential Family
Placements Ltd**

The Lodge
Foxborough Hill
Eastry
Kent
CT13 0NY

11th December 2003

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?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Ethelbert Residential Family Placements Ltd

Tel No

01227 470770

Address

Cheesemans Farmhouse, Alland Grange Lane, Manston,
Kent, CT12 5BZ

Fax No

Email Address

headoffice@ethelberthomes.co.
uk

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Ethelbert Residential Family Placements Ltd

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mr David M O'Brien

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

22.01.02

Date of Inspection Visit		11th December 2003	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Alex Turner	099984
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany Inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Alex Turner	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

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Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Ethelbert Residential Family Placements Ltd. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.
<p>Ethelbert Family Residential Scheme is somewhat of a misnomer and a name that better reflects the origins of the service rather than it's current status; what the agency provides is a Fostering Service as defined by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. At the time of this inspection the agency had twelve approved foster homes who could offer and / or were providing care and accommodation to children / young people presenting with various needs from a range of different backgrounds and ages. The agency is currently based in small premises in Westgate on Sea; there are plans for relocation to larger accommodation (still in East Kent). A small team of staff constitute the agency, the Manager, two field social workers (one having a recognised social work qualification) and an office administrator. The registered provider has stated the intention to employ another field social worker to compliment the existing team.</p>

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the Inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

This inspection assessed the agencies performance against each of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the agencies compliance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The agency has demonstrated effective action has been taken to address the requirements and recommendations made in the previous inspection report. Foster carers who provided written / verbal feedback have unanimously praised the agency in terms of its operation and the support provided. Feedback from children / young people has also been in the main very complimentary. Overall the agency has performed well against the standards. Eighteen of the standards were assessed as met, seven as nearly met. Five major shortfalls have been highlighted three relating to training and two concerning recruitment checks on sessional staff. One standard was not applicable. It was not possible to give a definitive rating for the remaining standard. Providing the agency works towards meeting the requirements and recommendations made in this report in the manner it addressed the last inspection report the Inspector is confident service provision will continue to go from strength to strength.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Not applicable

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Alex TurnerSignature A Turner

Second Inspector

Signature

Locality Manager William Wallace

Signature

Date

26/01/04

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	3	FS1	The registered person shall ensure that information provided in the Statement of Purpose accurately reflects the services provided in the day-to-day operation of the agency.	15/02/04
2	17	FS2	The registered person shall ensure that the arrangements for support to be provided to foster parents outside office hours are in the primary interests of children placed (see recommendation no. 2)	15/02/04
3	42	FS4	The registered person shall establish a means to provide copies of the reports (produced in line with regulation 42) on request to any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service, any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service and the parent of any such child.	15/02/04
4	11	FS8	The registered person shall ensure that before a placement is made with a foster carer the foster carer in question has undertaken training relevant to the identified needs of the child / young person being placed; and that they have sufficient proven experience of effectively dealing with the type of issues that the young person to be placed is known to have presented with.	30/01/04

5	34 schedule 6	FS10	The registered person shall ensure that the arrangements for a child to have contact with his parents and any other specified persons, and details of any court order relating to contact are clearly articulated in the placement agreement.	15/02/04
6	20 schedule 1	FS15	The registered person shall ensure that for all persons working for the agency on a sessional basis full and satisfactory information is obtained in respect of the information required by reg. 20 - schedule 1	15/02/04
7	11	FS23	The registered person shall ensure that before a placement is made with a foster carer the foster carer in question has undertaken training relevant to the identified needs of the child / young person being placed; and that they have sufficient proven experience of effectively dealing with the type of issues that the young person to be placed is known to have presented with.	30/01/04
8	20 schedule 1	FS25	The registered person shall ensure that for all persons working for the agency on a sessional basis full and satisfactory information is obtained in respect of the information required by reg. 20 - schedule 1	15/02/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1	The registered person should consider reviewing the distinction made between the fostering service and the residential family placement scheme or, ensure that the agency follows it's own criteria in relation to the distinction made and the provision and management of services.
2	FS2	The registered person should review the current arrangements for providing out of hours support to foster carers and end the practice of staff who are off 'sick' or otherwise absent providing this support.

3	FS4	The registered person should establish a means to ensure that any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service, any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service and the parent of any such child are aware that a report is produced relating to the Managers review of the quality of care (in line with reg. 42) provided by the agency and that they are entitled to have a copy of the report on request.
4	FS8	The registered person should ensure that written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer.
5	FS17	The registered person should act on their verbal confirmation to employ another fulltime member of social work staff at the earliest opportunity, taking into account operational circumstances (for instance very soon after the proposed change of premises)
6	FS20	The registered person should ensure all staff members have easy access to written details of the current policies and procedures of the agency.
7	FS26	The registered person should arrange for the move to new premises to take place at the earliest practicable opportunity.

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

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

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

Number of Inspector days spent	5
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NA
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with Manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	26/11/03
Time of Inspection	11:15
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	25

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The agency makes a distinction in the Statement of Purpose (SOP) between foster carers and foster carers recruited as Residential Family Placement (RFP) foster carers. The Manager explained that RFP foster carers are more experienced and are more likely to be considered in the matching process for young people who present with issues that have been identified as being more difficult to manage and effectively provide for. The Statement of Purpose asserts that '...separate criteria for both Foster Carer recruitment and for the matching of referred children and young people for each of the services ('regular' foster carers and RFP foster carers) it provides'. This did not prove to be the case in practice. For instance foster carers with relatively little experience and who were recruited as 'regular' foster carers had two young people placed with them who going by the placing authorities written assessment presented with a high level of previously difficult to manage behaviour (and who in fact had previously had a number of prior placements break down). It was confirmed by the Manager that these carers were effectively being used and paid as RFP carers despite the status of their recruitment. The distinction is confusing especially as the separate criteria mentioned in the SOP is not being followed by the agency itself. The distinction has an unhelpful influence on the matching process and has no place in the context of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 (FSR2K). Otherwise the SOP presents the information required by the FSR2K in a suitable format. The Inspector highlighted areas, which the Manager may wish to consider amending. The Manager has kept the SOP under review. A children's guide has very recently been published and distributed accordingly.

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?

2

The Manager of the agency has the required childcare and Managerial experience. He holds a recognised qualification in social work (Diploma in Social Work (DipSW)). The Manager has confirmed that he is completing training to attain the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Operational Management (level 5). At the time of the inspection the provision of twenty-four hour on call support to foster carers was the primary responsibility of only one member of staff. The Inspector asserts that this arrangement is unsatisfactory and fails to demonstrate in this instance that the fostering service is organised and managed in a manner that delivers the best possible childcare. This assertion was strengthened by the fact that during this inspection the member of staff operating the on call system was off sick yet still providing the primary response to out of hours emergencies.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

As part of the registration process of the agency the National Care Standards Commission carried out background and personal checks (required by the Fostering Service Regulations 2002) on the Manager and responsible individual. These checks resulted in satisfactory outcomes hence the suitability of these persons in relation to their professional capacities has been confirmed.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

In line with regulatory requirements (reg. 42 The Fostering Service Regulations 2002), the Manager has developed a system to monitor and improve the quality of service provided. The system incorporates consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and the placing authorities of the children being looked after. Reports have been produced that summarise the findings of the monitoring exercise. Regulations require that copies of the reports produced must be made available on request to any foster parent or prospective foster parent of the fostering service, any child placed with a foster parent by the fostering service and the parent of any such child. This was not the case at the time of this inspection and a requirement is made to make arrangements to do so. Roles of management and staff have been defined in updated job descriptions. Staff of the fostering agency and foster carers that spoke with the Inspector were clear about their lines of accountability. Financial procedures are managed via Ethelbert Specialist Homes finance department; by his own account the Manager of the fostering agency has very little input to the financial control of the agency. Evidence was seen to confirm that the fostering service has informed Managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

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

9

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.

1

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

3

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

1

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4) The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
The Manager has a clear job description setting out duties and responsibilities and does not hold a similar position in another organisation. The level of delegation and responsibility of the Manager, and the lines of accountability, have been defined. Arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the Manager is absent.		

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Inspector had arranged to visit four foster homes as part of the inspection process. Due to a family sickness at one of the homes only three were subsequently part of this inspection. The three homes visited comfortably accommodated all whom were living there and were warm, adequately furnished, decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. All the homes visited provided single rooms to the children being looked after as opposed to any of them being in a shared bedroom. Evidence was forthcoming to demonstrate that foster carer's preparation and training cover health and safety issues and that carer's are provided with written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Where foster carers provide transport for the children looked after, the fostering service has carried out checks, for instance insurance documents and MOT certificates, to ensure that this is safe and appropriate to the child's needs.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Preinspection questionnaires completed by foster carers confirm that training has been provided in promoting equal opportunities, recognising, valuing and working with cultural difference, anti oppression and anti discriminatory practice. Training records sampled corroborated this finding. Preinspection questionnaires completed by children being looked after included the following comment, '...I'm in a loving home with nice people who are very fair to me and respect me for the colour of my skin...' Without exception preinspection questionnaires completed by young people being looked after included testament they are being encouraged and provided with opportunities to develop and pursue interests and hobbies. Preinspection questionnaires completed by placing authorities have included complimentary remarks concerning the services and support that has been provided to children looked after who have learning disabilities, communication problems and '...extensive special needs'.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****1**

Feedback from foster carers was unanimous in terms of satisfaction with the matching process as far as the agency was concerned (feedback was not so positive about the quality and amount of information provided by placing authorities at referral / matching stage of prospective placements). The Inspector emphasises that it is the duty of the agency to ensure sufficient information is obtained and analysed at this stage to ensure the matching process takes into account all relevant factors. There was an instance where an emergency placement was made when the foster carers had not received training the agency had deemed they required. Their level of experience as foster carers was limited increasing the prospect of their inability to effectively deal with issues related to the young person being placed. The placement broke down within days causing trauma to the foster carers, the young person placed and the young person whom was already being looked after at the foster home. Foster placement agreements are not individualised. They contain no specific reference to elements of matching taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and failed to identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer. Evidence was found that racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs are taken into account in the matching process. The agency provides training, support and information to foster carers aiming to ensure that when transracial / transcommunity placements are made young people looked after are provided with care that aims to help them develop a positive understanding of their heritage.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

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

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

The training for foster carers includes child protection, child prostitution awareness, managing challenging behaviour, communicating with children, missing childrens' procedures, risk assessment and bullying. It was not determined the extent these training courses cover issues relating to caring for children who have been abused, safe caring skills, recognising signs of abuse and on ways of boosting and maintaining a child's self-esteem. Safe caring guidelines are provided for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and others in the household. It is made clear in the written information provided to foster carers by the agency that corporal punishment is not acceptable. Systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. Foster carers visited said they believed they are provided with all the information the agency had about the foster child and their family to enable the carer to protect the foster child, other children for whom they have responsibility and themselves. Foster carers said that there have been occasions when information provided to the agency and subsequently to them from placing authorities has been lacking. The Inspector emphasises that it is the duty of the agency to ensure information is obtained to ensure all relevant factors are taken into account.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%
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Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Foster carers sign their agreement that contact arrangements will be complied with. However, any arrangements that may have been made for the supervision of contact have not been clearly articulated in individualised Foster Placement Agreement(s). Feedback from children being looked after and placing authorities has confirmed that contact arrangements are complied with and have been satisfactory. During the inspection evidence was forthcoming of the commitment the agency has in supporting children being looked after to maintain contact with others who are important to them. Foster carers confirmed that they had attended preparatory training that included the importance of helping a child to maintain appropriate contacts and the skills required to encourage and facilitate such contacts. Information is provided to carers with regard to the financial support provided for transport or other costs involved in ensuring contacts take place. Evidence was provided to demonstrate that foster carers' record outcomes of contact arrangements and the perceived impact on the child and that this information is fed back to the child's social worker. Feedback from foster carers regarding the support they receive (including support around contact issues) from the agency has been highly complimentary.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Sampled records, discussion with foster carers and written and verbal comments from children provided evidence of staff and carers consulting with, offering assistance to and gaining contributions from children on matters affecting them. Children being looked after provided examples of changes made on the basis of what they have said. Examples of changes made / choices respected included dietary provision, who they stayed with, who they had contact with, recreational facilities and the internal decorations in the home where they were living. Communicating with children is included in the training provided to foster carers; the Inspector has assumed this includes the importance of listening and responding to children's views, an assumption that is validated with reference to the preceding text in this standard. Evidence has been found that the children in foster care know how to raise any concerns or complaints, and that they have received feedback on any concerns or complaints raised.

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**

The agency places a requirement on foster carers to ensure children / young people placed with them are registered with a local GP, and are supported to access health services according to their identified need(s). Written and verbal feedback from young people / children placed indicates satisfaction with the support they have received in this area. Preinspection questionnaires completed by placing authorities have included complimentary remarks concerning the services and support that has been provided to children looked after who have learning disabilities, communication problems and '...extensive special needs'. Both the agency and the foster carers with whom the Inspector has had contact with demonstrated a good level of awareness with regard to health services in their area. Foster carers have asserted that the agency has passed on to them details of the health needs of children placed with them. Documentation demonstrated that health records are updated during the placement and considered in the planning and review of care. Training records indicate that foster carers have received training in relation to health promotion and administering first aid.

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**

Records and discussion with foster carers highlighted efforts being made to ensure children / young peoples educational needs are properly addressed. These efforts though have not in all cases resulted in entirely successful outcomes. Foster carers expressed frustration with the difficulty experienced in securing proper educational provision for children / young people placed with them. Foster carers explained that this failure was in their opinion a result of inadequate planning, support and provision on the part of placing authorities and local education departments as opposed to any shortfall on the agencies behalf. Placement agreements require foster carers to take an active role with respect to all matters relating to the educational needs of children / young people placed with them. Records are maintained of the educational attainment of children and young people being looked after and of the numbers excluded from school (no exclusions reported at the time of this inspection). The agency makes clear its expectations on foster carers that arrangements will be put in place if any child / young person in their care is not in school. This expectation had been acted on in practice. Foster placement agreements identify where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

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

There are written requirements in the foster carers handbook of what is expected of them in terms of preparing young people for independent or semi-independent living. There was no evidence that foster carers receive training to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to young people preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living. The handbook explains that foster carers need to provide all children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills. Feedback from some of the young people indicates that this has been the case in practice. Examples given by young people of support in this area included work experience being arranged and opportunities to develop domestic skills being provided by foster carers.

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?

1

The system for the recruitment and selection of permanent staff reflects good practice in safeguarding children and young people. Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. However, evidence was not found that all people working for the fostering service on a sessional basis have had rigorous background checks to assess their suitability for the work they are to undertake. Permanent staff members have appropriate experience and qualifications or have undergone training and receive supervision relevant to their function. Due to a lack of records relating to sessional workers it was not possible to unquestionably determine if all social work staff involved in assessment and approval of foster carers are qualified social workers, have experience of foster care and family placement work and are trained in assessment. Again due to a lack of sufficient records it was not possible to unquestionably determine if all educationalists, psychologists, therapists and other professional staff are professionally qualified and appropriately trained to work with children and young people, their families and foster carers, and have a good understanding of foster care.

Total number of staff of the agency:

4

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

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There is a defined management structure; staff and foster carers were clear about to whom they were accountable. Job descriptions have been revised; responsibilities and management delegation have been defined. **The agency has established systems to review the approval status of carers. Review reports are referred to the fostering panel for consideration and comment. It was put to the manager that in the instance where there have been fundamental changes in foster carers circumstances it would be good practice for the panel to have opportunity to consider these changes in relation to the foster carers approval status prior to any subsequent placement(s) being made.** The manager has provided regular supervision and consultation for social work staff. Staff and carers are encouraged to undertake on-going training. Additional administrative staff has been employed. Please also refer to the text in standard 2 regarding the management of out of hours support to carers.

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 full time staffing complement, in terms of numbers, is inadequate to meet, at all times, the needs of the fostering service. The current staffing levels cannot satisfactorily compensate for any level of staff absence. This has been recognised by the Manager and registered provider; the Inspector was informed that an additional qualified social worker is to be recruited in the near future. Staff retention has not been an issue. The recruitment strategy was discussed; the Manager acknowledged that whilst it is desirable to recruit carers from a range of differing ethnic and cultural backgrounds to reflect referrals received limited success has been achieved in doing so. The assessment process for foster carers takes into account and addresses all relevant factors following recognised procedures to do so.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

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

Verbal and written feedback from foster carers has been unanimously positive about the support they have received from the agency. Comments made by various foster carers included, '...brilliant support when you...or your foster child needs it', '...support...100% day or night...sensitive to our needs as well as (to) the children that are placed', '...the agency in my opinion is the best I've worked for', '...I am very satisfied with the support', '(the support), it's brilliant'. The Inspector acknowledges that these comments may be interpreted as a contradiction to the first line of text in the preceding standard however asserts that these comments are by virtue of the dedication, skill and commitment of staff members and that additional staff are still required. Out of hours management and support services are available for foster carers though the arrangements of this are less than satisfactory (see text in standard 2). Foster carers receive supervision on average once a month. Expectations of foster carers relating to health and safety are outlined in the handbook provided to them by the agency. Public liability and professional indemnity insurance obtained by the agency meets regulatory requirements; the agency has been unable to find an insurance company that will underwrite costs arising as a result of child abuse claims against any staff or carers. A whistleblowing policy has been developed.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

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

Training programmes for staff and foster carers have been / are under development. **The manger has confirmed there is a planned induction programme for staff working with the agency.** The inspector discussed the induction process with a new member of staff who explained they planned and coordinated their own induction in consultation with the manager. There is an annual appraisal system identifying training and development needs. Training needs have been identified in the individual supervision of staff and foster carers and has related to their designated function(s). Regular team meetings serve to keep staff informed of changes in any legislation or guidance that are relevant to their jobs. The effectiveness of training programmes is evaluated and training programmes are reviewed by the agency in conjunction with the training manager of Ethelbert Specialist Homes. Joint training between fostering service staff and foster carers has occurred / been planned.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

Personnel records inspected contained written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of each staff member. Policies and procedures of the organisation are under development; at the time of the inspection there was not an up to date manual of policies and procedures which staff could easily 'pick up and refer to'. Records demonstrated that staff members coming into contact with foster carers and prospective foster carers and children/young people receive supervision in line with this standard. Regular team meetings are held that all staff members have been able to attend notwithstanding unforeseen events and absences.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

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

The effectiveness of the strategy for working with foster carers is born out by the comments foster carers have made in relation to this matter (see text to standard to standard 18). Self-help / support groups for foster carers have been facilitated by the agency. Both the agency worker(s) and the foster carers spoken with were clear about the role of the supervising social worker. **Annual review reports (of foster carers) have been prepared and made available to the Fostering Panel though not in all cases prior to subsequent placements being made (see text to standard 16).** Communication between the fostering service social workers and placing social workers has depended to a degree on the management arrangements of individual placing authorities and individual placing social workers.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

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

Foster care agreements have been written in a way that emphasises to foster carers what expectations are placed upon them and of what they may expect of the agency. Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named social worker (whilst one of the supervising social workers has not attained a recognised qualification in social work they do have substantial experience in their field. The support provided by this worker has been highly commended by foster carers). Records of supervision have been maintained. Foster care agreements sampled complied with regulatory requirements; the Inspector discussed with the Manager ways in which the agreement could be more 'user friendly'. Foster carers have confirmed they are given a handbook containing policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. Unannounced visits by the agency to foster homes have been carried out and the outcome of such visits has been documented. The quality of practical support provided to foster carers has been illustrated in the test to standard 18. Procedures for dealing with complaints are included in the foster carers handbook, the Statement of Purpose and the childrens guide. Complaints have been recorded and outcomes monitored by the Manager of the agency. The Manager was slightly confused about the distinction between records of allegations and records of complaints and has lumped these together as one. Procedures to deal with investigations into allegations are also briefly described in the foster carers handbook. Circumstances in which a carer may be removed from the foster carer register are outlined in the disciplinary rules and categories of conduct section of the foster carers handbook.

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?****1**

There was an instance found where an emergency placement was made where the foster carers had not received training the agency had deemed they required, neither had they sufficient experience as foster carers to ensure as far as this is practicably possible that they would be able to confidently and effectively deal with issues related to the young person being placed. The placement broke down within days. An expectation is placed upon all foster carers by the agency that they attend training though this has not resulted in all of them doing so as planned. It is the agencies duty to ensure that foster carers are trained in the skills required to meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care. If this is not the case then serious consideration needs to be made with regard to this deficit in the matching process (see text to standard 8).

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

Deficits in the information held on children / young people placed were found. In all cases the responsibility for these deficits was laid at the door of the placing authority by the agency (& foster carers). Whilst based on the evidence available this claim is not disputed the Inspector asserts that it is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that sufficient information is obtained prior to making a placement in order to safeguard the welfare and safety of all involved. Where a placing authority has not provided necessary information, a copy of the request for this information has been kept by the agency (and was available for inspection). The agency has developed a written policy on case recording in line with this standard. In each of the fostering homes visited as part of this inspection evidence was found that suitable arrangements have been made to store confidential information in a secure manner.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

1

A range of records was inspected including children's, staff and carers' files, and records of complaints. The records were reasonably well maintained and easy to navigate. Separate records were kept for permanent staff and sessional workers; as stated in the text to standard 15 the records relating to sessional workers was unsatisfactory and failed to meet regulatory requirements. The records of complaints needed to more clearly include details of any investigatory process carried out, any conclusion reached and subsequent action taken. Records were stored securely at the time of this inspection; satisfactory arrangements had been made to ensure the security of the premises.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			12
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:			3
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- **The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.**

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The premises and facilities are only just managing to accommodate the function and operation of the agency. The Inspector shares the view of both the Manager and registered provider that the service has outgrown it's current accommodation and that larger premises are now called for. To this end plans are nearing fruition to relocate the office base to a larger dwelling outside of Thanet (though remaining in East Kent).

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?

3

Financial accounts were not requested for inspection. The registered provider has emphasised that financial accounts will be made available following any request made by the National Care Standards Commission to do so. Pre inspection intelligence relating to the operation of Ethelbert Specialist Homes indicates no reason for the Inspector to believe the financial status of the agency is anything less than the standard requires.

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?

3

See text in the preceding standard. The Manager of the agency said that he has next to no involvement with the financial management of the service; he stated that the finance team of Ethelbert Specialist Homes based at their separate headquarters deals with financial matters. The Manager stated that to his knowledge (and from day to day experience) the financial management systems in place have had no adverse effect on the operation of the agency.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

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

The agency has written information relating to fostering allowances that are paid. Foster carers confirmed they are clear about the allowances and expenses payable and how to access them, before a child is placed. Foster carers confirmed that they receive allowances and expenses as per the written information they have been provided with and that these payments are made promptly and at the agreed time.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

An observation of the fostering panel in operation and a discussion with the foster panel chair was included in the process of this inspection. The observation provided evidence that the panel was operating within regulatory requirements and gave proper consideration to information presented. The Inspector fed back to the chair observations made that included thought being given to ensure all members of the panel have a common understanding of the terms of approval being used such as what short term, short term breaks, long term, permanent or respite meant with respect to anticipated length of placements and approval status of foster carers. This was also discussed with the Manager and registered provider and the suggestion was made to include these definitions in the Statement of Purpose and / or referral forms to ensure the agency and placing authorities are not misunderstanding one another with respect to this matter. Foster panel members are subject to the recruitment checks including Criminal Records Bureau Checks at the enhanced level. The foster panel has access to and seeks medical expertise in the process of considering the approval or reapproval of foster carers. Quality assurance systems have been incorporated to the operation and review of the functions of the fostering panel. Foster panels receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews and are involved in the process as a matter of good practice. This good practice could be further enhanced with reference to the text in standards 16 & 21 of this report. Independent members of the panel include, expertise in education, mental health, and someone who has had experience of being looked after by foster carers.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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Due to the lack of clarity with regard to defining the specific nature of placements (see text above) it has not been possible to make a definitive assessment of this standard.

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?
Not applicable to the agency at the time of this inspection.	

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 11th December 2003 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Overall, the agency feels that the inspection took place in a thorough and fair manner; discussions with the inspector highlighted some areas where a common understanding of the standards is still being jointly developed between agencies and the Commission. This, it is felt by the agency, is to some extent reflected in the report and provides an opportunity for those not fully cognisant of this matter to misconstrue the agency's full and complete commitment to meet and where possible exceed the standards in all areas of its operation.

In relation to the point raised about the agency's matching in one particular placement in standard 8, since the report was written, the agency has addressed the Commission's comments with information relating to the carers experience which, the agency believes, to a large extent addresses this point. The agency has also, since the report was produced reviewed its matching procedures as communicated to the Commission recently.

The report in several places to this particular placement (Standard 1,8 & 23) which has not benefited from the several items of information the agency has provided, which, on balance, does not show the agency's ongoing and full commitment to good matching.

The report refers (Stan. 16 & 21) to a particular carer's review: the agency completed an internal review of the carer's approval as required and at a later date, as a matter of good practice, referred this to its fostering panel, which exceeds the requirements of the agency and provides good evidence of its commitment to high standards. The report would have benefited from the inclusion of this information.

The agency further feels that it has exceeded the standards in some areas and is aware of the absence of any rating which is above 3. Particular attention is drawn to, for example, standards 18 and 22 which refer to the exceptional levels of support provided by the agency as an overall policy, and believe that based on the scale used by the Commission a rating of 4 would be more suitable.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

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

YES

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

YES

Note:

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

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 23rd February 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

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

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I, DAVE O'BRIEN of Ethelbert Residential Family Placement 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	<u>D O'BRIEN</u>
Signature	<u>D O'Brien</u>
Designation	<u>MANAGER</u>
Date	<u>9-3-04</u>

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of Ethelbert Residential Family Placement 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.