



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

New Routes Fostering

**Father Hudson`s Society
Coventry Road
Coleshill
Birmingham
West Midlands
B46 3ED**

Lead Inspector
Warren Clarke

Announced Inspection
28th November 2005 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	New Routes Fostering
Address	Father Hudson`s Society Coventry Road Coleshill Birmingham West Midlands B46 3ED
Telephone number	01675 434000
Fax number	01675 434030
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Father Hudson`s Society
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Lesley Carol Malley
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 13th September 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Father Hudson's Society is the social care agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham. It provides Fostering and adoption, community projects, residential and day care for older people with dementia and younger adults with learning and physical disabilities. These services are largely within the old father Hudson's site in the town of Coleshill. There are two other social work offices in Whitney, Oxfordshire and in Newcastle under Lyme, Staffordshire. The Fostering Service operates solely from Coleshill.

New Routes was established in 1992 with funding from Children in Need. It is a small fostering project for young people, often "hard to place", aged between 8 and 18 in short term placements of up to 2 years, though long-term placements may be negotiated if a short-term placement is successful. Younger children may be cared for if part of a larger sibling group.

It offers foster care and can provide additional input such as life story work by social workers if required. The service covers a geographical area surrounding Coleshill of up to 20 miles, though this catchments area has been expanded. Foster Carers live in the Coventry, Warwickshire, Worcester and Birmingham areas. They must be prepared to travel to the office for training and meetings.

There are currently 18 carer households and 19 children placed.

The Registered Manager, Lesley Malley, also manages the Adoption Service. Anna Langford, Team leader conducts the day-to-day operational management of the fostering service and deputises for the Manager. There are four other fostering social workers (one an Agency Social Worker) employed in the service on a part time basis, three of whom work a total of 63 hours per week and the team is supported by one full time and one part time administrators one of whom acts as the Fostering Panel administration.

The society has a separately established fostering panel with a complement of members including an independent Chair and Vice Chairpersons and the specified numbers of social workers with child care and fostering experience and independent practicing foster carers.

SUMMARY

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

This fostering service's annual inspection was conducted over three days and involved examination of records, procedures, case files (both children's and foster carers), and assessment of practices. During the course of the inspection, three foster care households were visited during periods when the children/young people were present and the inspector was able to interview the carers, talk with the children and assess the material condition of the homes. The managers and staff of the fostering service were interviewed and the inspector was able to observe a staff meeting.

Note, the fostering service's performance was assessed, at the last inspection, against all of the standards with which it must conform and on that occasion was judged to meet or exceed most of them. On this occasion, the inspection focused on those standards, which were not met in full and those that are key and therefore assessed on each occasion.

Throughout the report the fostering service or the Service is used to mean New Routes Fostering. The Service caters for children and young people and where, for example, children is used it is intended to include young people. Carers is used to represent foster carers and any reference to the standards and regulations means the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, respectively.

What the service does well:

This is a professional and efficient fostering service. It is being effectively led and the rigorous assessment, training and support of its approved carers has resulted in a contented partnership of carers and staff who are motivated in their joint objective to give children a positive experience of foster care. The Service is performing well in its contribution to the five outcomes now deemed crucial in the care and development of all children: being healthy, staying safe, making a positive contribution and enjoying a good quality of life now and being equipped to do so as adults.

In particular, the Service is doing some sterling work in ensuring that children receive any specialist services required, that needs arising from, for example, their disabilities, religion and culture, are met. The service performs well in promoting the children's health, assisting them to maintain contact with their families and others who are important to them, and in supporting their education and leisure interests.

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection there were two areas in which the Service was assessed as not fully complying with standards in respect of ensuring that all foster carers had documented authorisation to arrange medical treatment for the children placed with them. Also in ensuring that in each case there was a placement agreement setting out the child's circumstances and needs and what is expected of the carer in this regard. Both of these matters have now been addressed. A number of good practice recommendations were made in relation to administrative and procedural matters such as the merit in Manager conducting audits of compliance with the children's placement agreement as part of the review of the quality of the service. Some of these recommendations were seen to be addressed and others have been reported as being fulfilled.

What they could do better:

The Service is not assessed as having any significant deficits, but in terms of good practice is recommended to:

- document the factors that inform all decisions in the process of matching children to carers;
- inform the Commission as soon as practicable (usually within 48 hours) of any notifiable events; and ,
- ensure that there is clarity about how often fostering social workers should see the children placed when they are conducting the monitoring and supervision of the carers and their households.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

The health and development of children and young people placed with carers in this fostering service, are being promoted and safeguarded by sound health care arrangements and comprehensive guidance and training for carers, which enable them to carry out this aspect of their duties effectively.

EVIDENCE:

Examination of records, Foster Carers Handbook, Placement Plans and notes of children's reviews, all revealed that the fostering service is taking careful steps to ensure that children placed with its carers are maintained in good health. It was noted that the Foster Carer Agreement requires the carers to promote the children and young people's health in the ways that any good parent would, and they are provided with clear guidance on how to do this. For example, carers are required to register with the foster family's GP children placed on a long-term basis and arrange a similar service for those placed short term.

It was noted in the children's records that placement plans and other documentation amass information about the health of each child sufficient to enable the foster carer to plan, monitor and respond to their health needs appropriately. In all cases examined, there was authorised consent to emergency and routine medical and dental treatment.

Records kept by foster carers showed that they were, indeed, routinely monitoring the children's health responding, recording and reporting any concerns to the children's social workers and the fostering service. When asked about how they approach the day-to-day health care of foster children, the carers who were visited indicated that they do so as if the child was a member of the family. That is, they ensure they benefit from the primary health services and are prepared to advocate for them when specialist services are indicated. In this connection, one set of carers explained how, not being satisfied with explanations given for a child's delayed development in some

areas, they made their own observations and conducted some research, which resulted in the child being accurately diagnosed and now receiving the specialist treatment needed. The fostering service also arranges for carers to receive training in first aid so that they are able to respond appropriately to any accidents that children placed with them might have.

Health care records kept by the foster carers also showed that children were actually receiving regular medicals, dental and optical checks and that where specialist medical or other services were required these were being provided. Case review notes seen among the children's records revealed that health features as a distinct agenda item for those meetings and serves as a further check that the children's health and proper development are being addressed. These measures combined and the healthy lifestyles that the fostering service requires carers to promote to the children and young people are deemed to satisfy the requirements of standard 12. Furthermore, they are proving effective in maintaining children in good health as was apparent in those children and young people who were seen at inspection who appeared to be vibrant, active and well. The foster homes, which were visited were all clean, comfortable and in no way deleterious to health and it was noted, from information provided by the Manager, that during the last year carers received training in understanding Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (4) and in Health, Eating and Nutrition (16).

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3, 6, 8, 9 and 15

Sound policies, procedures and practices, and their effective implementation by this fostering service, are proving successful in protecting children and young people from avoidable harm, abuse, neglect and other forms of unfavourable treatment.

EVIDENCE:

One of the means adopted by the fostering service to ensure the protection of children placed in its care, is to appoint a Manager (standard 3) who is competent to run the service and whose character and abilities are such to provide the professional leadership necessary for promoting and safeguarding the children's welfare. This also applies to staff (standard 15) employed in the Service. Checks were made to find out if the Service has applied the necessary safeguards set out in the relevant standards and they revealed the following:

The fostering service has clear staff recruitment and selection procedure, which, in addition to the formal interview process, introduces all the measures, set out in regulations 5 and 20 (Schedule 1) for establishing the fitness of the Manager and staff employed in the Service. In this regard, it was noted that there was proof of staff members' identities, satisfactory written references, statements of acceptable Criminal Records Bureau checks, proof of qualifications and professional registration. It was also noted that in addition

to staff's professional qualifications, which, in all cases were relevant to their duties of assessing and supporting foster carers to protect and promote the proper development of children and young people, they also had opportunities for ongoing in-service training and professional development. In their interview with the inspector, staff confirmed the information gleaned from their records and observed that the selection process for their current posts was rigorous. The only shortfall observed was that though telephone enquiries are reported to be made to follow up on written references no records are kept of this being the case.

Observations during the inspector's visit to a sample of foster homes and examination of policies and procedures and foster carers initial assessments and reviews confirmed that requisite care is taken to ensure that the foster homes are safe and comfortable places for children to live. All carers are assessed to determine whether they are fit to care for children and young people and this includes evaluation of their accommodation.

In assessing potential carers accommodation, the Service takes account of the size of the accommodation, its material condition in terms of furnishing, fittings, potential hazards and decoration. The fostering service has a policy of all children who are in foster care having their own bed and bedroom unless they are siblings in which case they might be permitted to share a bedroom depending upon their age and circumstance. Each foster home therefore needs to have the capacity to provide this and were seen to do so in all those, which were visited. The Service's health and safety policy takes account of potential hazards in the foster home such as unguarded stairs, fire, etc, where young children are to be placed. It also takes account of perimeter security, hazards in the garden such as poisonous plants and risks that pets in the household might pose to any children. There was evidence in one of the carer's files, which was examined to confirm that the Service commissioned an assessment and report by a qualified veterinary surgeon of a breed of dog in a foster home where it was intending to place children.

The Service provided written evidence, which was corroborated by foster carers to show that it has a safe caring policy, which requires all foster carers to adhere to guidelines drawn up for their particular household in this regard. These guidelines are practical measures such as car safety where carers use their own vehicles to transport children placed with them and protocols about dress, privacy and assisting with personal care. The safe caring guidelines and protocols are intended to provide the children with physical safety and minimise any compromise of privacy, dignity and circumstances in which abuse or perception of it might be likely.

Carers are introduced to safe caring as part of their preparation prior to their approval and receive subsequent training such as that which the Manager declared was given on 13/04/05 and attended by 9 carers. Staff and carers confirmed that each foster home's safe caring guidelines are considered and,

as appropriate amended, with every new child placed or if the composition of the household changes. Safe caring also features in foster carers' annual review.

The fostering service cites its careful and successful matching of children/young people with carers as another measure that it takes to promote and safeguard children's welfare. This process is intended to ensure that the carer is able to meet the child's needs. That is, the carer's abilities, experience and interests are in line with what is necessary to meet the child's needs and that both child, carers and those in carers household will be comfortable with each other.

Staff and carers when interviewed by the inspector about how the match between child and care is conducted in practice, outlined a process thus: The fostering service receives referrals from local authorities of children they wish to place in either short or long term foster care. Using an internal matching checklist, the fostering service social worker considering the referral identifies those carers whose profiles appear to be compatible with the needs of the child. This is confirmed at staff meeting/handover, the carers are alerted and their profiles are forwarded to the placing authority for their consideration. In short, the placing authority decides which carer is most appropriate and following further exchange of information a process of introduction commences and culminates in a professionals meeting to confirm or otherwise the suitability of the match and to plan the child's entry to the foster home. It is understood that for long-term placements, the Fostering Panel approves the match.

Carers told the inspector that the matching process is thorough and that it takes some time between referral and the actual placement of a child. They were supportive of this approach, which they consider to be successful because it is child-focused – proceeding at their pace and minimises the likelihood of the placement being disruptive because of the planning and proper introduction of the child to the foster home. The way the children and young people have settled in their foster placements, their positive accounts of how they were introduced to their carers and low numbers of placement disruption confirms the foster carers' observations of the matching process.

Although the matching process in practice works well, it would be helpful if it was documented, formally adopted and a copy inserted into the Foster Carers' Handbook. It is also advised that a summary of the factors in the matching process that informed the decision to place the child is included in the foster placement agreement. Further, that where a match is not ideal, this and the compensatory actions, which are to be taken, are also noted in the foster placement agreement.

The fostering service has comprehensive child protection policy and procedures, aspects of which constitute the Code of Conduct for Foster Carers.

This sets out the Service's procedure and guidance for identifying and reporting abuse, makes reference to the local Area Child Protection Committee's procedures and is linked to the whistle blowing policy. In addition to providing training in safe care, the Service cited evidence that child protection training features on an ongoing basis for carers, the latest such training being given on 28/04/05 when 13 carers participated.

In order to ensure that children and young people are not subjected to any form of ill treatment, the Service provides clear guidelines for carers in control and discipline. The guidance suggests a wide range of acceptable strategies to encourage good behaviour, acceptable sanctions and clear directions on the sanctions and treatment, which are not permissible such as corporal punishment, rough handling or otherwise harmful or humiliating punishment. It was observed from other policies, procedures and guidance that the service has introduced measures to promote anti-bullying, recognise and support children who are, or at risk of, being bullied; to respond in timely and appropriate manner in the event of a child being missing from a foster home and a system for monitoring these events.

All the above measures are were deemed sound and they are in keeping with the relevant standards. The Service's system for monitoring child protection events shows that in only two instances the child protection procedure was invoked, children were missing and the police were involved. In all these instances the relevant procedures proved effective and the Commission was notified of the incidents. Those in control of the Service, should, however, notify the Commission of events specified in regulation 43 (1), Schedule 8, at the earliest opportunity (within 48 hours). In two instances when the Commission was notified of events, it took 7 and 4 days, respectively to do so.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

7 and 13

Children placed in this fostering service's care benefit from services, which in principle and practice take proper account of needs arising from their gender and disabilities and make provisions for their requirements in relation to their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background and their education.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service declares its intent to provide services to counter deprivation and enhance children's quality of life in the context of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. Further, it will take positive measures to redress inequalities and discrimination by providing services with equity regardless of gender, race, religion, etc. In practice this was reflected in a high ratio of foster carers from minority ethnic groups and the Service's ability to make same race placements. Also in the matching, equipping and support of carers enabling them to respond appropriately to needs arising from children's gender, disabilities, religion and culture. For example, carers receive initial and ongoing training in valuing diversity and are provided with clear and helpful guidance on how to care for children in ways that respect their heritage, foster positive identity and worth.

Although on this occasion the inspector did not directly observe the care of children with disabilities, records which were seen showed that there was planning and allocation of resources in such cases to promote independence and enhance their quality of life. It was noted that the service is ensuring that carers encourage children to pursue interests and hobbies thus some of the

children who were seen confirmed that they were involved in Scouts, Girls Brigade and church youth groups. A carer advised the inspector that the fostering service also facilitates access to an activities club on Saturdays (the Take a Break Youth Club) for children and young people with special needs so as to ensure that children have access to a wide range of activities.

The fostering service sets out in its Foster Carers' Handbook, clear guidance and expectations of how carers should support children's education. It also identifies for them, helpful sources of information such as the Department for Education and Skills Guidance on the education of looked after children and the National Teaching and Advisory Service's Carers' Handbook. Recognising that some children placed in the fostering service care will have special educational needs, it was noted that last year, arrangements were made for its carers to receive training in this topic. This was intended to familiarise them with the special education system so that they are better able to support those children with statements of special educational needs.

Among the records seen were school reports, letters and notes, which provided evidence of foster carers liaising effectively with schools in support of children's education. Carers also provided the inspector with anecdotal evidence of checking schools league tables and making other enquiries to find the best local schools for children who are to be placed with them long term. Those carers who were interviewed placed a high value on education and were entirely in accord with the fostering service approach. They cited other examples such as encouraging children to complete homework, monitoring and liaising with schools in relation to the children's progress and generally acting as any good and wise parent would to secure the best educational outcomes for the child.

No detailed or specific checks were made of the Service performance in terms of how its support impacts on the children and young people's actual educational attainment on this occasion. However, information published in its Young People's Newsletter (Vol.1, issue 3 – Oct 05) shows despite being a relatively small service (19 children in placement at the time of inspection) 5 achieved good GCSE and A' level passes. As a result of this one young person is to take up a place at university and another at college. This and the evidence outlined above shows that the fostering service and its carers are serving the children and young people well in promoting their educational achievement and has therefore satisfied the requirements of standard 13.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 and 11

Children placed in the fostering service's care benefit from being looked after in ways that recognise the importance of contact with their family and other significant people in their lives, and act to facilitate and support such contact, where permissible. The Service also recognises that if children and young people are to have a positive experience of foster care they must be listened to and have opportunities to express opinions on the quality of, and decisions about, their care.

EVIDENCE:

In both the foster carers' preparation programme and in their post-approval guidance and training, the Service makes them aware of the importance of children being able to maintain contact with relatives and others who are important to them. The Foster Carers Agreement and fee structure require carers to support contact arrangements and, unless otherwise indicated, permit contact to take place at the foster home. All the carers who were interviewed were in complete accord with fostering service's principles and arrangements for children's contact. In some cases, they observed that developing a good working relationship with birth parents via contact was beneficial in helping children to settle.

In all the five instances of children whose cases were closely examined, the placement agreement setting out how they are to be cared for, included details of contact arrangements and the notes of their case reviews indicated that this aspect of their care is being monitored. The children who were seen during the inspection all knew and understood their contact arrangements and expressed no dissatisfaction in this regard.

Carers' records show that they are noting, as required, occasions when the children have contact and observations of their response during and/or after contact visits. In short, the fostering service and its carers are deemed to do all that standard 10 required in order to promote children's contact with their relatives, friends and others who are important to them.

The fostering service is keen to empower children and young people by ensuring that they know their rights, are aware of their responsibilities and the sources to approach if they have particular problems, are subject to avoidable circumstances that make them unhappy or if they believe their rights are being denied. In this context, the Service provides young people with an information pack with helpful information about what they can expect of the fostering service during their foster care. It also gives useful sources where children and young people might seek specific information such as about health and helplines such as Childline. The Service promotes its clear and child-friendly comments and complaints procedure and the role of the Commission and the Children's Rights Director among agencies they may approach if they have any concerns or complaints about their care.

It was noted that the outcome of the Children's Rights Director's most recent consultation with children and young people was passed on to those in the Service's care and was the subject of discussion at the latest Carers' Support Group. This was by way of making the children and their carers aware of views and issues raised by children looked after or otherwise living away from home.

At the time of inspection, the Service was consulting on how to make more effective its means of obtaining regular feedback from children and young people about their care and the quality of the service. This is most encouraging, as any additional survey will complement children's views, which are already being elicited in the process of their foster carers annual review and at the end of their placements.

In terms of examples of how the Service demonstrates that it is prepared to listen and take seriously children's views, it cites the case of a Muslim child who requested additional tuition and this was provided. Foster carers also cited the example of a child who expressed a wish to be christened and was assisted to secure the necessary consent for this to happen. It was also noted that recently a young person's introduction to carers was suspended to give him time to articulate ambivalence, which was manifest in his behaviour during the process. Also, where complaints or allegations have been made, the records show that the Service takes them seriously and deal with them accordingly.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

14 and 29

The fostering service equips its foster carers to prepare young people for adulthood and makes the financial provisions necessary to sustain their economic wellbeing in the process of so doing.

EVIDENCE:

Examination of the Foster Care Agreement reveals that all carers approved by the Service undertake to: "Participate and support the young person when preparing to leave care". This is in addition to the expectation that they will promote the proper development of each child in their care, i.e., ensuring that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary towards in time leading independent lives. In order to ensure that carers understand their role in this regard, one of the modules in *Skills to Foster* training is devoted to preparing children and young people for adulthood.

Although none of the young people whose cases were tracked were of the age where specific plans (Pathway Plans) were being made for their independent or semi-independent living, the Service is aware of the requirement of such planning where relevant and ensures that this is a feature in the review of young people's cases when appropriate. Carers who were interviewed during the inspection when describing their practice recognised the need to teach and support children and young people to develop independent living skills commencing with their own personal care. For example, one carer explained work, which was being done to teach a young person cooking skills.

The Service was deemed to perform well in planning for the future, as set out in the evidence above and in maintaining the children and young people's current economic wellbeing. In terms of current economic wellbeing the

service has provided evidence in the form of a written policy of its fostering allowances and expenses, which is published annually as, required. The Service declares in its policy the allowances it pays are in line with that recommended by the Fostering Network and is reviewed and increased annually in line with the cost of living index. Loyalty bonus payments are also made to carers, contingent upon their performance, training and development.

Carers, who were interviewed endorsed the policy and said that the sums of money paid in allowances and fees were sufficient for the children's maintenance and care. The Service gives carers guidance on how they might wish to apportion the children's allowance, e.g., percentage towards food and clothing. Carers said that this is most helpful and they appreciated the clarity and efficiency of the payment system. On the basis of all the evidence, the inspector is satisfied that the Service has fulfilled the requirements of standards 14 and 29 and is therefore promoting and safeguarding the children's welfare by securing their economic wellbeing.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17, 19, 21 and 24

The service is operating successfully underpinned by sound management and administration, and a competent staff team providing support, which carers consider commendable. Succeeding in recruiting a reasonable range of carers with the necessary attributes and resources, the Service is able to fulfil the placement demands made, as dictated by its Statement of Purpose.

EVIDENCE:

In demonstrating that it provides adequate numbers of staff with the competence to discharge its duties to the children and young people in its care, the fostering service was able to provide the following evidence: It employs an appropriately qualified and experienced manager and a team leader to run the Service, the latter deputising in the Manager's absence. It also employs two full time and two part time fostering social workers all of which are relevantly qualified and experienced in child care and are now specialist in fostering. The records show and staff confirmed in interviews that the fostering service is a good employer providing regular professional supervision, annual appraisal and post-qualifying training and development opportunities.

The staff members' register reveals that the service has a good staff retention record most of those currently employed have been so for over three years. The Service was able to show an acceptable contingency plan for the event of staff shortage and that its workload management system makes more than adequate provision for support of carers and staff training and development. Currently 18 carers are on the Services approved register. This number represents foster care households in which both partners are registered and in some cases where extended family members have been approved as back up/respice carers. The actual numbers of carers involved is therefore greater than the official count.

The number of foster homes that the Service provides appears to be commensurate with the demands made upon it and the geographical area that it serves. Until recently, 22% of the Service's carers were of African-Caribbean, Asian or dual heritage origin. However, resignations during the last eighteen months have brought this down to 17%. Patterns of referrals and actual placements suggest that the Service is responding well to the needs of children and young people in its area. The Manager reported that recruitment is to feature among the Service priorities in the near future in order to secure a more diverse pool of carers and to contribute to the Service's plans for expansion.

As was established at the previous inspection, the Service has a clearly defined assessment and approval process for foster carers, which adopts nationally recognised preparation and assessment frameworks, i.e., Fostering Network's *Skills to Foster* and the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F Assessment. Examination of carers' records showed that in each case they have undergone a rigorous assessment and, in most cases annual reviews, which fulfils the requirements set out in the quality indicators 17.6 and 17.7 of standard 17.

As outlined earlier, staff employed in the Service all undergo an induction, receive monthly supervision and are appraised annually by the Manager when

their individual training needs are identified and agreed. They are provided with training opportunities both internally and externally to keep up with developments in practice and changes in legislation. At the time of inspection plans were in place for all fostering service staff to receive training in the new adoption legislation and one member of staff had recently received refresher training in child protection. Staff members participate in the Foster Carers Support Group, an aspect of which is devoted to training and, where relevant to their needs and interest, they join in the carers' annual training programme. For example, they were involved in the Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and in Domestic Violence and the Impact on Children.

It was noted, from foster carers' supervision records, relevant policies and procedures and accounts given by staff and carers during interviews, that the Service has a properly considered and well established strategy for supporting and enabling carers in their tasks. Carers commended the support they receive and confirmed that they receive monthly supervision visits (more frequently if necessary) and regular telephone calls from their support workers. They consider their support workers to be approachable and skilful and place value on the arrangements that enable them to receive peer support from other carers and being able to share experiences, information and skills in their support group.

Carers highlighted the Service's out-of-hours support arrangements as being particularly supportive. They explained that because this service is provided by the usual fostering social workers on a rota basis, staff members were able to respond to their support needs more effectively. That is, good communication in the Service means that staff members know the children and the carers and are aware of any current difficulties and are therefore able to respond in an informed way. Carers also said that they experience the respite care arrangements, which are agreed at the time of their approval, as being clear efficient and supportive.

The Foster Carers' Handbook, record of training that carers have received and guidance given as shown in their supervision notes, confirmed that they are assisted in dealing with other services such as health and education. Taking account of the records, policies, procedures and practices seen in relation to the recruitment, assessment and support of carers and the planning, placement care and treatment of the children and young people, it was concluded that there is clarity of the roles of all those involved. Further, there is effective communication among them and good working relationships, which impact positively on the children's care.

The Service has a written policy on case recording and provides training for staff and carers in recording and record keeping. All those records, which were examined, were full, accurate and up-to-date. They give a good account of the circumstances of both the carers and the children who are placed with them and provide accurate commentary on the Service's inputs.

In all cases examined, carers and the Service were deemed to have sufficient information about the children in order to enable a good understanding of their background and needs. This was also considered sufficient to enable carers to assist the children with current issues and past events in their lives. The Service maintains full records of carers and children's details, which it stores securely and makes acceptable provisions for carers to do the same in respect of children's confidential information. It was also noted that the Service has an acceptable access to records policy and procedure and that carers are encouraged to assist children and young people to record and capture images of significant events of their time in foster care. This is to ensure that living away from home does not come to represent a gap in the child's life, but a period when she/he has continued to develop, participate and achieve.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
31	N/A

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	4
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	3
29	3

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS8	The Registered Person should ensure that on each occasion when a placement is made, a statement is included in the child's and in the carer's records setting out the factors that informed the decision about the suitability of the match. The statement should include any compensatory measures identified as necessary where the match is not ideal or particular shortfalls have been identified.
2	FS9	The Registered Person should ensure that when it is necessary to notify the Commission of significant events, this is done as soon as practicable after the event.
3	FS21	The Registered Person might consider prescribing the frequency at which fostering social workers should see and talk with the children placed with foster carers when conducting the monitoring and supervision of carers.

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