



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

Fostering Services

Fostering Services (WCC)

33 Tachbrook Street

Westminster

London

SW1V 2JR

28th February 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

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

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

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

YES

Name of Authority

Fostering Services (WCC)

Address

33 Tachbrook Street, Westminster, London, SW1V 2JR

Local Authority Manager

Mr Mark Pomell

Tel No:

020 7641 8055

Address

33 Tachbrook Street, Westminster, London, SW1V 2JR

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

NO

Name of Agency

Tel No

Address

Fax No

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

Name of Registered Provider

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Date of first registration

Date of latest registration certificate

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

09/02/04

Date of Inspection Visit		28th February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Wynne Price-Rees	075578
Name of Inspector	2	Ann Gavin	075587
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mark Pommell Placement & Support Manager	

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(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

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- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
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- 9. Fostering panels**
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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

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

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Westminster City Council's Fostering Service provides full-time, short term and respite placements for approximately one hundred and sixty-seven children and young people. Responsibility for fostering provision is shared across the Fostering Service, Adoption Service and Westminster Accommodation and Leaving Care Team whom all report to the Head of Commissioning for Looked After Children. Each service has a designated manager. The Fostering Service operates two teams of social workers, each with its own Team Manager. One team deals with the recruitment and approval of foster carers; the second team supports foster carers after approval by the City Council's Fostering Panel. Placements are made with foster carers approved by the City Council, through Independent Fostering Agencies and, in some cases, with relatives. All placements are approved by the Council to ensure children and young people placed are safe and well cared for. Most of the responsible teams are based in the same building and share information regarding the children receiving a service with the designated children's social workers located in the LAC team and based elsewhere. The offices provide secure accommodation for confidential information. The foster placements provided are located within London and elsewhere in the country.

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.)

During the office based week the inspectors interviewed staff from all the relevant services, the Chair of the Fostering Panel, sampled files held by the LAC team and interviewed the ART Manager responsible for identifying appropriate services to meet needs. Eight foster carers were visited in their homes, interviewed over the telephone or had questionnaires sent to them. Questionnaires were sent to a sample of young people. Ten young people were case tracked. At the last inspection there were three recommendations made and these were all met. No requirements were made. Generally, the service provides a high care standard within safe environments. There are comprehensive recruitment, assessment and monitoring policies and procedures and a lot of work has been carried out regarding recruitment and training. Particular emphasis has been put on clarifying the role of foster carers and what is expected of them. One area of concern was regarding the CRB clearance of some long-standing carers, where previous police checks had been accepted in lieu of current CRB clearance in accordance with agreements in place. Some of the police checks had lapsed and up to date CRB clearance not obtained. The lapsed clearances were a small proportion of the foster carers and across all the teams with fostering responsibilities.

Statement of purpose

This Standard was not inspected.

Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service

Of these standards one was met and one not inspected.

There are three teams with managers that are responsible for fostering provision. All three have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including monitoring, quality assurance and the managers have been vetted in accordance with the requirements of Schedule 1 as part of the council recruitment procedure. This includes CRB clearance and applies to all staff with direct access to children. Records of checks and references are kept centrally by the Human Resources Department. The foster panel members have also been CRB cleared.

The fostering service is managed by two teams of qualified social workers. One has responsibility for the team that recruits, assesses and trains foster carers. The second is responsible supervising all foster carers.

Management of the fostering service

The two standards in this section were not inspected.

Securing and promoting welfare

seven standards were met, one exceeded and one not inspected.

The Inspectors visited eight foster carers in their homes. Overall the accommodation was of a high standard. There were support plans on site detailing required care provision and how it will be achieved. If all appropriate internal placement provision has been exhausted the ART team has a list of preferred independent fostering agencies. A pilot scheme is being launched to recruit flexible carers, within the borough, to respond to emergency placements, those that are difficult to match or where placements have broken down or are in danger of doing so. There is also a Safer Caring policy and guidance available on the service expectations regarding foster carers and the way that service must be delivered including specific policies relating to bullying and corporal punishment.

The City Council provides a personal computer with internet access to each foster home where there are children placed. The Supported Lodgings and kinship network schemes did experience difficulty meeting the monthly visit targets due to sickness and staff vacancies. However posts have now been recruited to and the backlog is being addressed. A recruitment drive has taken place to provide carers with ethnicity backgrounds that match areas of demand regarding placement trends. The standard that was exceeded was in respect of the importance attached to each child's education and the attention to detail to make sure they receive the best possible appropriate educational start in life.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers
Of nine standards, one was met, one exceeded, one not met and six were not inspected.

All Managers and social workers have a professional qualification. There have been a number of changes in personnel since the last inspection, in some areas of the services and this resulted in a backlog of work that is now being caught up on. Staff interviewed commented that a lot of good quality supervision and support is available to them and this was reflected in the knowledgeable and in-depth responses they made in respect of how the fostering services work and their particular roles and responsibilities. A large needs focused variety of training courses are made available to carers that compliment the NVQ training. These include First Aid; Epilepsy Awareness; Preparing to Leave Care; Caring for Sexually Abused Children and Child Protection. There is generally a high training take up by the carers although less use of the courses is made by network foster carers whom have been in the service over a long period of time. In addition to formal training courses there are also stress management workshops for foster carers.

There was one area of concern regarding valid CRB checks in respect of a small number of foster carers across all the teams with responsibility for fostering placements. Not all had a CRB clearance in place and in some instances there was a substantial time difference between a police check lapsing and a CRB check having been applied for. One standard was exceeded regarding the quality of the staff within the teams and the recruitment of foster carers.

Records

Of the two Standards one was met and one not inspected.

The carers contacted felt well supported by individual foster care social workers and the service in general. The well-documented carers files including contact information backed this up. The files inspected were well organised and important information was easily located.

Fitness of premises

This Standard was not inspected.

Financial requirements

The three standards were not inspected.

Fostering Panels

This Standard was met.

The Fostering Panel meets every two weeks and the Inspector attended one panel meeting as part of the inspection process. There were comprehensive policies and procedures in place, although some members said they had not fully read them. The panel meeting followed the prescribed procedure with panel members agreeing who would ask particular questions. A robust dialogue took place between members of the panel including the panel advisor and all expressed before arriving at a decision.

There was a difference of opinion regarding preparation of foster panel members to carry out their duties with some panel members stating they had been trained sufficiently whilst others thought they had not been given in-depth training. The panel advisor explained duties. Two training days have taken place in July and October 2004 with one focused on policy and role and the other regarding issues. There was disagreement regarding the annual training provided with some panel members feeling it was focused on the requirements of their role whilst others thought it was not provided in an appropriate forum.

Checks have been carried out to ascertain the suitability of foster panel carers including CRB checks.

Information is provided regarding foster carers annual reviews and panel members are kept informed of the range and type of carers available in comparison with the childrens' needs. The majority of panel members felt their input was valued and they worked well as a quality assurance tool.

Short-term breaks

This Standard was met

There are policies and procedures in place regarding short-term fostering breaks and these are focused on keeping the role of the birth parents, as appropriate, central to the way care is provided and presented. The Family Link scheme provides links for families of children with disabilities and there are currently up to twenty-five links to children provided.

The part-time scheme provides families of non-disabled children with short breaks to provide the family with support as well as carers with respite placements for children. Carers providing this service were visited and felt they received good support and information from the fostering service.

Family and friend carers

This Standard was met.

The network and kinship scheme acknowledges different needs of fostering within the family environment but remains focused on the child's safety and well being as the primary placement motivating factor. There was resistance from some long-term carers to attending training and carers' forums although the service has endeavoured to encourage better attendance and has been successful with the carers more recently recruited. The scheme carers have also tended to view the child's social worker as first point of contact and improved relationships between the supervising social workers and families is built up by attending quarterly visits with the LAC team workers.

A lot of work has also been put in surrounding the carers' perceptions of what is expected of them and the support they can expect from the fostering service.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

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

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

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

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Wynne Price-Rees **Signature** _____
Second Inspector Ann Gavin **Signature** _____
Regulation Manager Julian Sainsbury **Signature** _____
Date _____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements 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	20	FS15	All foster carers must have current valid enhanced CRB checks.	06/05/05

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS21	The fostering service continues to support and encourage longer established foster carers involved in the kinship network scheme to attend training and support groups.
2	FS30	The panel members' induction should include observing a meeting prior to commencing in post.

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

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

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

Number of Inspector days spent	10
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	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	28/02/05
Time of Inspection	10.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	80

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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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?	
This standard was not inspected.		0

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?	
Fostering provision is split between the Foster Service, which provides the bulk of foster placements, the Adoption Service that provides network kinship and long term fostering and the Accommodation and Leaving Care Team whom provide a supported living scheme. All departments with fostering provision have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including monitoring, quality assurance and the managers have been vetted in accordance with the requirements of Schedule 1 of the regulations, as part of the Westminster City Council recruitment procedure. This includes CRB clearance and applies to all staff with direct access to children. Currently two CRB checks have been sent to Human resources for updating. Records of checks and references are kept centrally by the Human Resources Department. The foster panel members have also been CRB cleared.		3

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?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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

X

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

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

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

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

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

X

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

X

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?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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
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The foster carer recruitment procedure identifies the rationale for establishing suitability of an individual to be a foster carer within a safe and appropriate environment. The service takes into account the differing necessary criteria in respect of kinship fostering and that carried out by carers on the fee scheme as well as those involved in the Supported Living Scheme. The carers receive a minimum annual unannounced visit from allocated foster carer social workers that is recorded in report format as well as frequent phone contact. The service also endeavours to carry out joint quarterly visits with the identified child's social worker from the LAC team.

An appraisal of each foster carer takes place that contributes to the Foster Panel Review. The Adoption Service experienced some difficulty meeting the unannounced visit targets over the last year due to staff shortages. Posts have now been recruited to and the service is meeting the visit requirement.

The kinship network service presents problems regarding the perceived role of some long term nominated carers in respect of them being family members and that has led to some resistance to visits from the foster carer social workers as the children's LAC social workers are perceived, by the carers, as the main contact point. The fostering agency has therefore relied, to a certain extent, on the LAC team to provide a considerable amount of information. This has worked well when there are consistent LAC social workers allocated and good systems of communication are in place. It has not worked so well when there is a high social worker turnover and some fostering agency social workers have experienced difficulty gaining information when requested. Any difficulties are chased up at managerial level. The fostering team has worked hard to breakdown this resistance in respect of new kinship carers by holding a number of family meetings to clarify roles and service expectations and this has been more successful. Information packs and network support plans have been introduced and there is improved rapport with the kinship carers through increased available support.

Some of the supported lodging reviews were also outstanding due to project worker sickness absence. This is also being addressed.

There is a proposed move of the teams to share the same building as the LAC teams and this is envisaged as an opportunity to enhance the communication links between the teams. The foster carers visited in their homes provided a good and comfortable standard of accommodation. All were aware of the health and safety aspects and had covered this in their training. A foster child seen was happy with privacy and personal space provided and felt at home.

Carers visited during the inspection had been fully informed of the purpose of the visit by their supervising social workers in the Fostering Service.

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**

Westminster Fostering Service has a comprehensive training programme for foster parents with some joint sessions with the social work staff within the service. The manager described diversity issues as being at the core of all training. The training programme includes Equality – Valuing Diversity, caring for Muslim children, caring for children with disabilities. All foster carers attend core training, which is renewed every two years. Anti-discriminatory practise is a key part of social workers appraisal and is an expectation of all foster carers as set out in the Fostering Agreement 2003. The foster carers visited were clear on valuing diversity and gave good examples of addressing the needs of the children placed with them. They felt that the social workers shared appropriate information regarding the children placed.

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?****3**

Westminster Fostering Service has an ongoing recruitment drive for foster parents. They advertise regularly in the local press and encourage word of mouth recruitment by offering a reward to carers who recommend friends and relatives. Team members described how the assessment and matching process worked to ensure the child's assessed needs are met. This includes a viability assessment over six weeks. One child who was an asylum seeker was matched with foster parents who although culturally different, came from an asylum seeking background and the child's key needs were well met. Carers spoke of the support and good rapport with social workers. Managers confirmed that if appropriate placements cannot be achieved by using carers supported by the Service, Independent Fostering Agencies might be used to identify an appropriate alternative placement.

The ART is a dedicated team that acts as a gateway into care for children matching them to suitable available services within the council and elsewhere. They also have a macro responsibility for monitoring and scrutiny of placements whilst the fostering services and LAC teams are responsible for the micro aspects and therefore not case accountable. The ART Manager and relevant team managers agree placements after consultation with the teams to identify placement suitability and a pen picture is made from available information. There is a proposed specialist fostering scheme to provide emergency, problematic and breakdown placement respite within the borough. The council is currently looking to recruit to this scheme.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8) The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There are policies and procedures in place including a safe caring policy and full training provided for foster carers in respect of what constitutes abuse, action to take if encountered and expectations of the service and those providing it. The staff designated with responsibility for foster carer placement and monitoring are qualified social workers whom have also received training regarding abuse and child protection procedures. They work in tandem with the social workers, from the LAC team, whom have been allocated caseloads in respect of individual children and quarterly joint visits to foster carer placements take place and LAC reviews are attended as appropriate. The foster carer social workers also carry out annual unannounced visits to foster carer homes, with accompanying report, to assess if the required standards are being maintained. The children have access to the Young Person's Complaints Officer and advocacy through the Children Rights Service. This is stated in the pocket guide to fostering and children's guide to fostering.</p> <p>The fostering agreement states that corporal punishment is an unacceptable form of punishment for children. There is also a comprehensive policy regarding bullying.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	X	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9) The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There is a policy and procedure in respect of appropriate contact and the agreements set down in individual LAC care plans are forwarded and explained to foster carers prior to a placement being made. A sample of the LAC care plans inspected contained required contact information. These are monitored by LAC social workers, whom have carried out a risk assessment, as part of the review process and feedback gained from foster carers by the foster carer social workers. Maintaining appropriate contact is included as part of the foster carer core training programme.</p> <p>The foster service makes transport available if travel is required to take a child to an agreed contact. Where possible carers are supported to provide contact within their own home if this is deemed safe and appropriate. The foster carers contacted confirmed that contact with family and friends was encouraged, if part of the agreed placement plan. One carer spoke of meeting with a parent prior to placement.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

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

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

The opinions of children placed are sought during the LAC review meetings, foster placement unannounced visits and at the annual Looked After Children User's Conference. There is also a Young Person's Participation Officer whom has responsibility for consulting with children to gather their views regarding their experiences in care and a children's video has been commissioned to promote their views on fostering. Complaints regarding foster carer placements are taken to panel and incorporated in a suitability review. The children also have access to the Westminster City Council complaints procedure that is outlined in the children's guide and this is facilitated by the Children's Rights Officer.

The importance of listening to the opinions of children placed is core to foster carer training and this includes contact. The one young person seen spoke of feeling listened to and was able to share what they felt. Their opinions were sought and respected. Foster carers are also issued with annual questionnaires.

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 LAC information sampled, contained comprehensive assessments of individual health and care needs. This information is passed on to the teams with responsibility for fostering placements that in turn make identified foster carers aware of them prior to placement in the form of the viability assessment. The LAC information includes a medical health check. The training provided to foster carers promotes a positive approach to general health as well as other aspects such as first aid, safe caring, healthy living, HIV, drugs awareness and sexual health.

Foster carers are responsible for registering children with GPs, arranging NHS dental treatment and access to community based health services. They are required to contribute to the review and planning process regarding the child's health needs. One carer spoke of how helpful the HIV course they attended was and how it enabled them to understand the practical issues more clearly.

All carers were aware of the need to promote health issues and said that both they and the children received a yearly health check. They were aware of any health care issues of the children with them and how to address them.

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?**

4

It is the council's responsibility to promote and meet the educational needs of all looked after children and this includes the provision of a personal education plan. All the LAC individual files sampled, held comprehensive plans tailored to the particular needs of the child. The needs were diverse incorporating cultural and language requirements and the matches made met needs as far as possible with resources available. Education also plays a major part in the statutory reviews. The foster care agency gives high priority to providing support to foster carers to enable them promote the educational needs of the child and establish good lines of communication with designated teachers whom have responsibility for looked after children, within a particular educational establishment, as well as teachers that directly have contact with the child. The direct contact encapsulates parenting duties and contact including attendance. There is also a dedicated Education of Pupils in Care Team that offers advice, assistance and support.

An educational development officer, education caseworker and educational psychologist also provide support to children in foster care.

The expectation is that each foster carer will provide an atmosphere conducive to study and to this end each fulltime foster carer on the fee scheme is provided with a PC for educational use.

Two carers spoken with were very involved in the education of the children placed with them. One was in contact with the educational authorities to ensure that they could attend a more appropriate school outside the catchment area. Another had ensured that they attended a faith school which would further their sense of belonging this child and has settled in very quickly.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

0

This standard was not inspected.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

There are clear and robust policies and procedures for the recruitment of staff that have contact with children as well as foster carers. Staff have appropriate social work qualifications and access to comprehensive training programmes focused on their roles and responsibilities. There was one area of concern regarding valid CRB checks in respect of a small number of foster carers across all the teams with responsibility for fostering placements. Not all had a CRB clearance in place and in some instances there was a substantial time lapse between a police check having lapsed and a CRB check having been applied for.

Total number of staff of the agency:

20

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

X

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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?	4
<p>See standard six. The staff interviewed showed an in-depth knowledge of their roles, responsibilities and accountability. They also had a wealth of experience that was demonstrated in the way they answered questions, put to them, regarding the fostering management systems in place and used scenarios to demonstrate their personal competence. They are a stable and good team with positive dynamics and all spoke of receiving good support from colleagues and the management team.</p> <p>The council has invested heavily in foster recruitment to reflect the diverse cultural needs of looked after children within the borough. This has not been entirely successful as the prevalent areas of need and cultural background of those requiring the service fluctuate. In the recent past there has been a need to recruit foster carers for babies and younger children. This has been replaced to a great extent by children coming from different cultural backgrounds whom in many instances are seeking asylum. Despite the foster teams making efforts, the communities from which many of the children originate are not yet well established and consequently recruitment is low. This has been counter balanced to an extent by people coming forward from communities that may have been seeking asylum previously and whilst not being a perfect cultural match have experience of the difficulties arising from asylum seeking and integrating into a different way of life. The Council has spent £50,000 in active recruitment.</p> <p>Carers have been made aware of the expectations of them, as part of the assessment process including a network carer assessment pack, practice guidance and other information and the support they can expect from the service.</p> <p>The carer assessment procedure encompasses all the requirements of standard 17.7. Carers seen were from diverse backgrounds and were well informed about issues surrounding fostering.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
<p>This standard was not inspected.</p>		

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not inspected.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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 fostering service provides excellent access to training focused on the needs of the foster carers that is generally well attended. A large investment has been made in foster carer targeted training that carers interviewed found extremely useful for preparing them for placements and to top up their existing knowledge. Support group forums are also provided. The supervising social workers are easily accessible to foster carers and generally visits have taken place within timescales. There is also a duty facility and on call access through the ART team. Clear identified lines of communication with the children's social workers within the LAC teams are in place although the quality varies between placements and individual children's social workers.

Induction training with supporting literature is also provided. See standards six and seventeen.

Some carers in the kinship network have shown a little resistance to attending training and the foster group meetings. They seem to be predominantly those that have been fostering for a longer period of time with the newer foster carers happy to attend. This may have arisen from the clearer guidance in place regarding foster carers perception of their roles and responsibilities, from the outset and also the support available to them. The service is endeavouring to support and encourage the longer established foster carers to attend. Annual reviews are prepared by supervising social workers and presented to the fostering panel.

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?****0**

This standard was not inspected.

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?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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

The fostering service keeps comprehensive records of the fostering placements and those provided with a service. This includes details of each child being provided with a service. More in-depth and comprehensive information regarding the child is maintained, on file, by the LAC teams that the supervising social workers have access to. There are well-established lines of communication between the teams and joint visits take place quarterly as well as supervising social workers attending review meetings as appropriate. See standard six.

Full details of a prospective placement are forwarded to a foster carer prior to a placement being made and agreed. Foster carer agreements were on file and required care plan information is kept, on site, by foster carers. Those interviewed said they have been trained in information recording expectations. Foster carers visited kept up to date information safely respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the children. Copies of monthly visits by supervising social workers were kept on file. There was generally a good standard of record keeping.

A computerised system is being introduced to ensure all required checks are followed up.

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?

0

This standard was not inspected.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			167
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			X
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			X
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	X	Maximum £	X

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

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

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

0

This standard was not inspected.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not inspected.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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	0
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This standard was not inspected.

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?

0

This standard was not inspected.

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

The Inspector attended one panel meeting as part of the inspection process. A number of panel members were interviewed including the Chair. There were comprehensive policies and procedures in place, although some members said they had not fully read them. The panel meeting followed the prescribed procedure with panel members agreeing whom would ask particular questions surrounding topics raised and to whom they would be addressed. This would be to either the prospective foster carer or the supervising social worker proposing. A robust dialogue took place between members of the panel including the panel advisor and all were given the opportunity to express their points of view and disagree with comments made before arriving at a decision regarding a prospective candidate and aspects of care they could provide.

There was a disparity of opinion regarding the preparation of foster panel members to equip them to carry out their duties with some panel members stating they had been trained sufficiently whilst others thought they had not been given in-depth training but had duties explained by the panel advisor. This disparity may have arisen from the length of time served. During the panel a new supervising social worker sat in as part of induction and it was felt, by some panel members interviewed and the Inspector, that this would be a useful exercise for prospective panel members to carry out to see how the system works. Two training days have taken place in July and October 2004 with one focused on policy and role and the other regarding issues. There was disagreement regarding the annual training provided with some panel members feeling it was focused on the requirements of their role whilst others thought it was not provided in an appropriate forum.

Checks have been carried out to ascertain the suitability of foster panel carers including CRB checks.

Information is provided regarding foster carers annual reviews and panel members are kept informed of the range and type of carers available in comparison with the children's' needs. The majority of panel members felt their input was valued and the worked well as a quality assurance tool. There were meeting minutes in place and a voice-activated device has been introduced to make sure of accuracy. Panel members felt complaints were dealt with in-depth and snap decisions were not arrived at although a panel member said they could not remember a foster carer being rejected.

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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There are policies and procedures in place regarding short-term fostering breaks and these are focused on keeping the role of the birth parents, as appropriate, central to the way care is provided and presented. The Family Link scheme provides links for families of children with disabilities and there are currently up to twenty-five links to children provided. The part-time scheme provides families of non-disabled children with short breaks to provide the family with support as well as carers with respite placements for children. Support is also provided for foster carers where the placements have been difficult and to avert placement disruption or breakdown. Carers providing this service were visited and felt they received good support and information from the fostering service.	
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Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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See standard six. There are policies and procedures in place for approving family and friends as foster carers under the network and kinship scheme. The policy differentiates between the needs of those fostering within the family environment and the fostering fee scheme. It is recognised that different criteria may apply but remains focused on the child's safety and well being as the primary placement motivating factor. As previously stated there has been more resistance from carers, whom have been on the scheme for a longer period of time, to attending training and carers forums although the service has endeavoured to encourage better attendance and has been successful with the carers more recently recruited. The scheme carers have also tended to view the child's social worker as first point of contact and improved relationships between the supervising social workers and families is built up by attending quarterly visits with the LAC team workers.

A lot of work has also been put in surrounding the carers' perceptions of what is expected of them and the support they can expect from the fostering service. This begins with at first point of contact meetings with the family and is backed up with literature including the introduction of a carers assessment pack, fostering pamphlet and guidance on what the service is looking for in a carer. There is also a general practice guidance guide for all foster carers that was in draft form. Whilst very comprehensive the Inspector felt the document too long to be used prior to being approved and may be more affective as a point of reference.

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 <enter date(s) of inspection here> and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

Comments were received from the provider

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

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

Note:

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

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

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

Action plan was required

Action plan was received at the point of publication

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

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

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

D.3.1 I _____ of _____ confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

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

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S0000048572.V204330.R01

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