



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**Warwickshire C C Fostering and Adoption
Development Team**

**Adoption Services
Faraday Hall
Lower Hillmorton Road
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 3TU**

Lead Inspector
Warren Clarke

Announced Inspection
17th October 2005 09:30

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	Warwickshire C C Fostering and Adoption Development Team
Address	Adoption Services Faraday Hall Lower Hillmorton Road Rugby Warwickshire CV21 3TU
Telephone number	01926 451911
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Warwickshire County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Brenda Vincent
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 24th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Warwickshire Fostering Service provides accommodation and care for children and young people who are being looked after, either temporarily or on a long-term basis, by the local authority. The service caters for children and young people aged 0 – 18 years of either gender. It makes available a wide range of foster carers in order to respond to the varying needs of those requiring a service.

Within Warwickshire County Council Social Services Department, the Principal Operations Manager, Brenda Vincent, has strategic lead responsibility for the Fostering Service. She is based in the Fostering and Adoption Development Team in Rugby.

There are five district fostering teams operating in each of the geographical areas of Warwickshire. There is a sixth Central Fostering Services Team, based in Rugby, responsible for the marketing, recruitment, preparation and training of foster carers. There is a Foster Care NVQ Centre offering the NVQ 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. The Emergency Duty Team maintains specific carers who can provide emergency out of hours very short-term placements. These teams support the recruitment and preparation of foster carers, assess prospective foster carers, make placement matches and provide ongoing support.

The service is supported by a Foster Care Development Officer.

There is a Fostering Panel that meets twice a month, once in the north and once in the south of the county. The Head of Children's Services chairs this panel.

Warwickshire has developed partnership arrangements with Barnardo's for a remand and Short Term Emergency Placements service (STEPS). Warwickshire also has a "preferred provider" arrangement with Pathways Care Ltd and offers a joint panel for this organisation. The fostering service provides a fostering service to all looked after children within Warwickshire's boundaries.

For recruitment purpose, foster carers are defined the categories: family and friends, permanent, family link or mainstream; in addition there are special emergency duty foster carers. The fostering service provides a designated social worker to foster carers, who also have access to the complaints and representations system and to the Children's Rights Service. The foster care service recruits, assesses, approves, trains, reviews and supports its carers. There is a Payment for Skills Scheme, respite, and sessional support for carers and a sitting service.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was conducted over three days and on the first day included another inspector, Sheila Briddick. Given the relatively short space of time between this and the last inspection and following representations by the Director of Social Care and Health, the inspector was directed to modify the methodology for the inspection. This means that only two foster homes were visited and three carers were interviewed by telephone.

Fostering service social workers were interviewed and so was a sample of children's social workers who made children's files available for inspection. The inspector saw the Service's central offices and the administrative arrangements at first hand, but did not visit any of the local offices. These were visited at the last inspection and did not give any cause for concern. It was decided not to make any special arrangements to meet with children and young people other than those who the inspector saw and spoke with in the foster homes. This was because the inspection did not coincide with a date on which the children's group met and as they are now regularly asked to take part in consultation events, it was felt that there is already enough documented evidence of their views. This evidence was provided for inspection.

The judgements and evidence presented in this report are therefore based upon the findings of the last inspection, views expressed directly and indirectly by children, carers, and staff and the inspectors observations from visits to the foster homes, examinations of case files and other relevant documentation.

Where children is used throughout the report it is intended to include young people and vice versa. Service Manager refers to the person nominated by the Local Authority as having delegated responsibility for the management of the Fostering Service, which is referred to as the Service. Wherever reference is made to the standards and the regulations, these are the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, respectively.

What the service does well:

The Service is well run and professional in its approach to the care of children. It has a clear management structure, lines of accountability and proper scrutiny. The first class training, development and support opportunities the Service provides for its carers is matched by its efforts to use this to benefit children in foster care. There are numerous initiatives and provisions such as

in the health, education, financial maintenance of children and consultation with them and their carers, which suggests that this is a service genuinely intent on giving children and young people a positive experience of being looked after in foster care.

What has improved since the last inspection?

At the last inspection there were only two requirements (i.e., issues which must be rectified) and 15 recommendations, which were made to promote good practice. The Service Manager provided evidence to show that the requirement related to assembling all the necessary information about children and their needs in the placement agreement has been addressed. The other requirement, which was about ensuring that the category and numbers of children that carers are approved for is specified in their individual Foster Care Agreement has also been attended in relation to newly approved carers, but over time will be done in respect of those who are already approved.

The Fostering service has accepted all the recommendations; most of which were procedural or administrative matters, and has produced an action plan to address these. As will be seen from the main text of the report, many of them have already been remedied.

What they could do better:

There is recognition within the agency that greater consistency is needed in the process of matching children with carers and that more carers need to be recruited in order to make the process meaningful. Also to reduce the need to place children outside of their local communities and to achieve a more representative ratio of carers who are from Black and minority groups. The Service Manager advised the inspector of plans to achieve some of the improvements indicated.

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 outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

Children and young people who are being looked after in this Local Authority's fostering service are assured of having their health care needs attended throughout their childhood or the time they are placed with foster carers. Furthermore, they are likely to be equipped with information to enable them to continue to take care of their own health when they reach adulthood.

EVIDENCE:

Working in partnership with relevant health care professionals, the local authority has established a clear and comprehensive system ensuring that health care needs of children in foster care are assessed, monitored and where necessary preventive and responsive interventions are made. Work done in this connection has culminated in a policy document: *Integrated Care Pathway for the Health of Looked After Children* (September 2005). This document ratifies existing practice in which access to child health services and the legal framework for establishing children's health history, consent to medical and other health care monitoring and treatment are clearly set out.

Currently, there is an expectation that among the essential documentation for all children who are newly admitted to foster care will be information about their health. Further, for all children and young people there is a medical assessment within four weeks of their placements and thereafter at six monthly and annually for those under 5 years and those over 5 years, respectively. Where children have known health conditions, this features in the placement plan and if the carer is required to carry out any atypical home care procedures in this regard, they are given training and advice by relevant specialists in the Health of Looked After Children's team.

Foster carers are required to monitor the children's health on a day-to-day basis and report any significant health issues. In practice, the fostering service arrangements for the children's health was reported and observed to be

working effectively. The Manager of the Service's of the Short-term breaks scheme (also sometimes referred to as respite care and, in this service, as Family Link) explained that since the children who use this service have significant disabilities and/or health problems great care is taken to ensure that the foster carers who care for these children and young people are fully briefed about their health care needs. Also that the short break arrangements do not commence until there is certainty that the carer is competent to carry out any specific home care/nursing indicated in the child's care regimen.

Records kept by foster carers, on examination, showed that they are provided with the health information necessary for them to care effectively for the children placed with them. That their recording reflects the expectation placed upon them to monitor and, as appropriate, report on the state of the children's health. It was also noted from children's case review notes that their health features as a discrete aspect of the review process and that reviewing officers are strict about checking that medical assessments and other health surveillance have been carried out in accordance with the Health of Looked After Children's policy.

The Fostering Service Manager presented at inspection a recently issued handbook for children and young people in foster care, which among other things seeks to promote good health maintenance. It explains the Service's child health policy and gives information about the effects of illicit drugs and alcohol on health. It also informs the children and young people where they might seek information and advice about relationships, sex and sexual health. In assisting foster carers to respond effectively to the children's health care needs, it was also noted from the records that they are provided with relevant training. For example, 45 foster carers received training in First Aid between October 2004 and September 2005 and an equally significant number received training in Blood Borne Virus, Eating Well for Looked After Children, Young People Drug and Alcohol Awareness and in HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis.

All the measures outlined above together with a small sample of children who were seen and who appeared, healthy, bright and active, amply demonstrate the fostering service's successful performance in promoting the development and health of children its care.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

6, 8, 9 and 15

Children placed with foster carers in this service benefit from a range of systems, policies, procedure and practices, which have been put in place to ensure that they are protected from preventable harm, abuse and other forms of unfavourable treatment.

EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection the Service performance was deemed successful in meeting the requirements of standard 6. However, those responsible for the Service were advised to clarify and monitor, as part of the quality audit specified in regulation 42, the circumstances in which a child placed with foster carers shares a bedroom. Assessment of this standard proceeded largely with this in mind and revealed the following:-

The assessment of potential foster carers continues to take account of the safety of their household in relation to any hazards that there might be in its environment. For instance, panels of non-toughened glass in a place where a child might fall and injure himself, a garden with poisonous plants or a pet which might pose a danger to a child. The assessment also considers the material condition of the household and number of children it can accommodate comfortably. All the foster homes, which the inspector visited, were deemed safe and provided each child with his/her own bed and a good all round material standard of living. Those households, which were seen where

children shared a bedroom, the sharing arrangement was acceptable since they were siblings, all under 10 years old and there was no recorded information to indicate that these arrangements might be unsafe. This observation was borne out by data that the Service Manager provided in relation to other children who share a bedroom and, incidentally, form a small percentage of the population of children in the Service's Care.

Children are placed with carers on the basis of a matching process, which is intended to reconcile the child's needs with the resources of the foster carers and their particular household. This works well for children with disabilities, but for others, as acknowledged by the Service Manager in the Self Assessment Form and recognised in Matching Decisions Audit (2003) in the Report of the Fostering strategy Task Group (11 October 2005), application and recording of matching decisions are variable. That said, there were no reports from children, carers or fostering service staff of children being inappropriately placed. Some staff did, however, indicate, confirmed by the Service's own research, that the shortage of foster placement options for teenagers and children of Black and minority ethnic origin meant that the matching process was sometimes simply a confirmation of the resource available at the time.

The Manager reported planning which is intended to in future bring more consistency to the matching process and in light of the present circumstances it is suggested that:

- A record is kept on the child and foster carers records of the basis on which all placement matches have been decided.
- That where a match is recognised as not being ideal this is recorded together with the measures which have been put in place to compensate for any lack identified.
- That the rationale for matching of children with foster carers is considered in the carers' annual review, which is being conducted and is informed by the annual inspection, and at the child's first review after placement.

A check was made of whether the Service has a system for monitoring instances where the local authority, under section 63 (12) of the Children act 1989, exercises its power to grant exemption in exceptional circumstances, from the usual limit of three children. That is, unless those who are placed are siblings. This was to find out whether care is taken to ensure the wellbeing of existing children and those who are to join the households under the exemption. The inspector found that the Service has adopted the West Midlands Family Placement Consortium's *Exemption from "Usual Fostering Limit" Policy and Procedure*, which, in essence, set out what must be taken into account in the granting of an exemption and the circumstances that might

merit it being granted. It was noted that the procedure entails Fostering Panel ratification of decisions to grant an exemption either prior to the certificate of exemption being granted or make observations of the decision subsequently. This shows that the necessary care is being taken to ensure that exemptions do not have any adverse effect on children in foster homes, that they are time-limited and closely monitored.

As was the case at the last inspection, the Service provides foster carers with guidance, procedure and training to equip them to operate within safe caring bounds and to recognise and report abuse. Each foster carer's household has its own safe caring guidelines, which feature in the carer's assessment and approval process, are reviewed in light of any changes to the household and, in any event, annually.

Foster carers who were seen or interviewed by telephone confirmed that they have been given training and guidance in behaviour management and clear instructions that corporal punishment and any other form of rough or humiliating treatment is not permitted. It was also noted that their training and the guidance they receive from the Service seek to alert them to the possibility of children in their care being bullied and how they ought to assist the child such an event. The fostering service promotes anti bullying in the information it gives to children in foster care and gives them helpful strategies to pursue if they become victims of bullying.

There is a clear procedure for foster carers to follow in the event of a child being missing from the foster home thus ensuring that timely action is taken to recover those who might be vulnerable. All these measures demonstrate that the Fostering service continues to act with necessary care to protect children. The Service Manager provided information suggesting that since 29/03/05 there were nine child protection events involving children in foster care. Whilst the information indicates that correct procedures were followed, in only 4 cases is the final outcome recorded. Accordingly, the registered manager is advised to ensure that the Service monitoring data records the final outcome of these events and notifies the Commission so that the corresponding notification, which it receives under regulation 43 is brought up-to-date.

Standard 15 was assessed, but since it was deemed met at the last inspection, it was only examined on this occasion to check a recommendation that was made then. That is, for staff records to reflect that reference requests specifically ask for comments on the candidates' suitability to work with children and for the contents of references to be verified by follow up telephone calls. The Service Manager was able to provide record of correspondence with the personnel department, a reference request form and a selection checklist to confirm that this matter has been addressed.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7 and 31

Children's racial, religious and cultural identity are positively promoted by the Fostering Service and within the legal framework for providing short break care, the Service reinforces disabled children's parents' role as their main carers.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service strives to ensure that through training guidance and, as necessary, specialist support, all carers are equipped to care for children in ways that take proper account of their needs in terms of gender, race, religion and culture. Indeed, two modules of foster carer's foundation training focus specifically on *Promoting Equality*. Foster carers who specialise in caring for children with disabilities either on the short break scheme or within mainstream fostering receive training to help them to maximise those children's potential and the necessary equipment and other resources to care for the child in line with his or her identified needs. The Foster Care Agreement commits carers to anti discriminatory practice and the Service Manager reports that the competency assessment model used in determining the fitness of carers also does so.

The matching process together with each child's placement plan is intended to secure the ideal in meeting the child's needs with equity, but there is a recognition that limitation of availability of carers from Black and minority groups, and general demand for places sometimes exceeding supply, means that the service does not always achieve the ideal particularly in circumstances where the placement is unplanned (made on a same day basis).

Apart from carers' own knowledge and skills in promoting equality and diversity they have access to specialists in the Family Link and Contact Carers scheme, an Interpretation and Translation service and personnel in a project Racial Equality and Celebrating Cultural Heritage (REACH), which provides advice to carers to assist children from Black and minority groups with issues such as identity and discrimination. These provisions and practices confirm that the service is taking proper account of the needs of children with disabilities and those from minority groups. No practice was seen or reported to suggest that adequate provisions are not made in relation to needs arising from children's gender.

Interview with the Team Leader of the short break scheme (Family Link) and examination of records, confirmed that children who normally live with their parents but use this service for defined periods, are deemed to be looked after (in voluntary care) during the periods when they are placed with foster carers. Nevertheless, the service is operated on the principle that it is intended to provide a break for the child and not to supplant his or her parents' usual responsibilities. Accordingly, the service is operated so that the birth parents continue to remain primarily responsible for promoting the child's health and education as outlined in standard 31.2.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11

All those involved in the Fostering Service are committed to enabling children and young people to maintain contact with their families and others who are important to them. There is an equal commitment within the service to an active seeking of children's views, listening and giving serious consideration to what they have to say and to adapt practices and service provisions accordingly.

EVIDENCE:

In all the placement plans examined, contact arrangements were clearly set out and the importance of children maintaining their family and friendship links is emphasised in the foster carers guide and in their training. One of the carers visited during the inspection had just returned from transporting the children to the venue for their supervised contact. The arrangements were complex since the children were placed at some distance from their usual home area. This set of carers explained that they were nevertheless prepared to support arrangements, however complex, because they believed that wherever possible children should be supported to maintain those links. In other homes visited the carers were able to show records of occasions when children had contact with their families.

In a children and young people's consultation event conducted on behalf of the Service last year, some of the children indicated that one of the good things about being in foster care is "contact with family and people you know". Others, whilst not complaining about having no contact, did indicate that one of the bad things about being in foster care is that you "Don't get to see your mum/dad/family/friends enough".

The work of the Fostering Service comes within the scope of one of the Local Authority's initiatives: Significant Improvements Gained through Management Action (SIGMA). This initiative is understood to seek to find out the experience of those who use foster care and other services and to make improvements where deficits are reported say, by the children and young people. The children and young people's consultation event mentioned above was organised by SIGMA. Having listened to the young people, it also had the effect of bringing about change in the way that their maintenance allowances (i.e., pocket, money, clothing, savings, etc) are allocated and paid.

A report of the SIGMA events showed that checks are made of the extent to which children are consulted in matters concerning their own lives and future such as being involved or being enabled to contribute to their case reviews. Also about opportunities to meet with Reviewing Officers on their own to get their views across before the formal meeting commences. It was interesting to note that, also as a result of consultation with the children and young people, foster carers profiles have been drawn up so that young people can make informed choices or at least have a clearer picture of what the foster home will be like before formal introductions begin.

Part of foster carers training is focused on affecting them with the importance of listening to children in their care. However, in order to ensure that children in foster care have a number of ways in which to channel their individual views about their care and the impact of the service on them, they have access to an advocacy service. This is in addition to their own social workers, the formal complaints procedure and their contributions to end of placement evaluations and foster carers reviews. The inspector considered that all the measures outlined above those proposed in the SIGMA Action Plan 2005 clearly demonstrate the Fostering Service's real commitment to giving children a voice and taking them seriously when they use it.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

29

The Fostering Service ensures that children are able to live full, comfortable and enjoyable lives and that they experience no material or financial embarrassment by being looked after in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

At the last inspection whilst there were no concerns about the allowances awarded to carers for the maintenance of the children they foster, some expressed discontent about a 'payment for skills' approach, which the service had introduced. Carers are encouraged to pursue training opportunities to improve their skills. They are graded 1 to 3 and elements of the allowances they are awarded are intended to reflect their assessed level of skill. Some carers thought this was unfair because it does not take account of the exceptional demands that some children make or the level of difficulty they present.

On this occasion, all carers who were interviewed said they were satisfied with the level of allowance they are given for the children's care and, currently, this is adequate for ensuring they enjoy an acceptable standard of living. The Service Manager's account and documents, which were seen, confirmed that the allowances given to foster carers are in line with those agreed nationally by the Fostering Network. A document: *Consultation Document Foster Care Finance*, was produced at inspection the contents of which indicate that the Fostering Service is not only keeping this aspect of its activity under review, but is consulting foster carers and giving them options from which to choose.

The inspector did not discuss this aspect of care with the children and young people on this occasion. However, it is noted from some of their responses to the consultation event mentioned above, that among the things they consider good about foster care is the personal economic wellbeing they derived from receiving a regular personal allowances and the treats such as going on holiday and to "nice places", which they experience as part of their care. With this in mind, the Service is considered to be making satisfactory financial maintenance provisions for the children and young people and is therefore fulfilling its duties in relation to standard 29.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

16,17, 21, 22, 24 , 25 and 32

The Fostering Service is being managed competently with an organisational structure that fits its geographical and service demand profile, sufficient numbers of staff to support and develop the carers and the necessary administrative arrangements to sustain its operation.

EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service is organised on the basis of five distinct local area teams, a central support team and an emergency duty team, which provides a service outside of usual office hours. The central support team includes the Service Manager, recruitment, training staff and development staff and the Family Link scheme, which serve the whole county. Currently only the Team Leader of the Family link scheme is in post, the other 2.5 posts being vacant.

All the managers, team leaders and social workers employed in the service are experienced and professionally qualified and including the vacant posts and excluding the Service Manager total 55. Note, this number represents the number of people in posts and rather than the number of full time posts. Records of staff details show that the Service is successful in retaining them in post and that they are provided with good in-service training and development programmes. This is considered a sufficient number of staff to support the Service, which has 260 foster carers and, currently, 336 children placed with them. It will, however, be necessary for the Service to act quickly to recruit to the two vacant posts in the Family Link scheme, as the sole member of staff who is currently running this scheme cannot reasonably fulfil all the duties required. It was noted that because of the staff shortage in this aspect of the Service unannounced visits to the foster homes in this scheme were not being conducted.

Examination of a sample of foster carers records, their own account of their recruitment, assessment and approval process and other documentation provided at inspection, confirms that the Service has a clear foster carer recruitment policy. Moreover, it takes care in assessing the character and competence of foster carers using nationally recognised assessment 'tools' and processes. There is recognition within the Service of its need to redouble its efforts to recruit more carers in order to provide the children with greater choice, reduce the need for them to be placed at too far a distance from their local community and to strengthen the matching process.

Foster carers told the inspector that they receive their supervision at the agreed intervals, that they found their supervising social workers helpful and that they are provided with a wide range of training and skills development opportunities. This includes a foster carer approved under the Kinship (family and friends) carers' scheme. Carers said they valued the Foster Carers' Support Group and the Service's recognition of, and response to, the impact of fostering on others in their households. Some reported a degree of frustration in contacting children's social workers on some occasions and difficulties in getting problems resolved when their usual supervising social workers are absent. The difficulty in getting problems resolved in the absence of their usual social worker was the time they had to spend acquainting the duty social

worker with the issue. They did not regard this as a major issue, more of an irritation.

Examination of a sample of records kept by the fostering service and foster carers, including those kept by the Service Manager for monitoring of activities specified in regulation 42 and its Schedules showed compliance with standard 24. That is, there is an effective record-keeping system, which ensures that records are kept in relation to the running of the Service, individual foster carers and the children placed with them. The records relating to the running of the service were observed to include staff details and information related to work being done towards achieving outcomes for children under the first five headings that form the body of this report. Among the details seen in foster Carers' files were those related to their assessment, approval, training development and review. In light of a recommendation, which was made at the last inspection, arrangements have been made for the category, for which foster carers are approved, to be refined and for this to be inserted in their individual Foster Care Agreement document.

Children's records contained all the information necessary – e.g., care plan, placement plan, health history – to enable proper planning and review of their care. This information, as seen in the records at the foster homes, is shared with carers so that they can respond appropriately to the children's care needs and help them to understand and, as necessary, influence their circumstances.

All the personal information about carers and children were seen to be stored securely both at the Fostering Service offices and in the foster homes. Foster carers are provided with training in effective recording and record keeping, an informative session of which the inspector was able to observe directly on 18/10/05.

Records such as minutes of the Fostering Panel, complaints and allegations are being kept as required by standard 25. Children's records are congruent in that the Local Authority, which controls the Fostering Service, has an integrated children's system of which the service is a part. The records, which were seen were clearly written and expressed, did not contain any stigmatising remarks and appeared to be factual in content. Indeed, the training given to staff and carers in Recording and Record-keeping is intended to provide them with the ability to maintain records in accordance with the quality indicators in 25.9 of the standards.

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	4

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

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

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

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

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

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	<p>Those responsible for the Service should proceed with the action plan to achieve greater consistency in the matching of children to carer process and in so doing consider including the following safeguards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A record is kept on the child and foster carers records of the basis on which all placement matches have been decided.2. Where a match is recognised as not being ideal this is recorded together with the measures which have been put in place to compensate for any lack identified.3. That the rationale for matching of children with foster carers is considered in the carers' annual review and at the child's first review after placement.

2	FS9	Records kept in the Fostering Service of child protection events should be brought up to date to show, in all instances, the outcome of the event. The Commission should also be provided with this information so that corresponding notifications made under regulation 43 might also be brought up to date.
3	FS17	Recruitment to the vacant posts in the Family Link scheme should be hastened so as to contribute to the foster carers recruitment plan and to ensure that unannounced visits to existing carers in the scheme are conducted.
4	FS17	Those responsible for the service should proceed as planned to recruit more foster carers, particularly from Black and minority groups so as to provide children and young people with a wider choice, keep them within or near to their home communities and to strengthen the matching process.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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